

HOGARTH LECTURES ON LITERATURE

STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE

HOGARTH LECTURES ON LITERATURE
SERIES

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STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE

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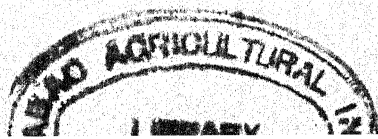
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PREFACE

WITH all diffidence I set forth this series of six lectures on Shakespearian tragedy. In order to provide a background, I am aware that I have been forced to retrace a certain amount of ground which has already been traversed before; clearly no one who writes on Shakespeare can ever escape from the work of his predecessors. Particularly is this true in regard to such a play as *Macbeth*, where a definite simplicity of treatment and of characterisation hardly allows of much difference in critical analysis. In publishing these lectures I wish to draw attention to two matters. In the first place, the lectures were designed to provide in moderate compass a critical survey of the purely dramatic development of Shakespeare's art in the realm of tragedy. I have looked upon the plays as experiments made by him in different moods and methods, and have striven above all else to indicate the development or movement of his art as he passed from *Hamlet* to *Lear*. No effort has been made to discuss the poetic value of the dialogue; all attention has been concentrated upon dramatic problems, considered as far as possible from the point of view of the creative artist. Secondly, I should wish to draw attention to the fact that, beside this wider



aim, I have had as my object the concentration on certain problems which seemed to me to have been either neglected or requiring further elaboration. Thus the influence of Horatio on Hamlet, the interrelations between the characters of Iago and Desdemona, and the dramatic motives in the two Elizabethan versions of the King Lear story have been dealt with at some length.

The substance of these lectures has been twice delivered; once, in 1921, in the six-lecture form as given here, and once, later, in a more extended series. I may add that in her recently published studies in Shakespearian drama Miss Lena Ashwell has presented the character of Desdemona much as I have done in the lecture on *Othello*. I rejoice to find corroboration in treatment from one who has regarded this play from the strictly theatrical standpoint, even although in the rest of the analysis (bearing mainly on the characters of Iago and Othello) I differ from Miss Ashwell.

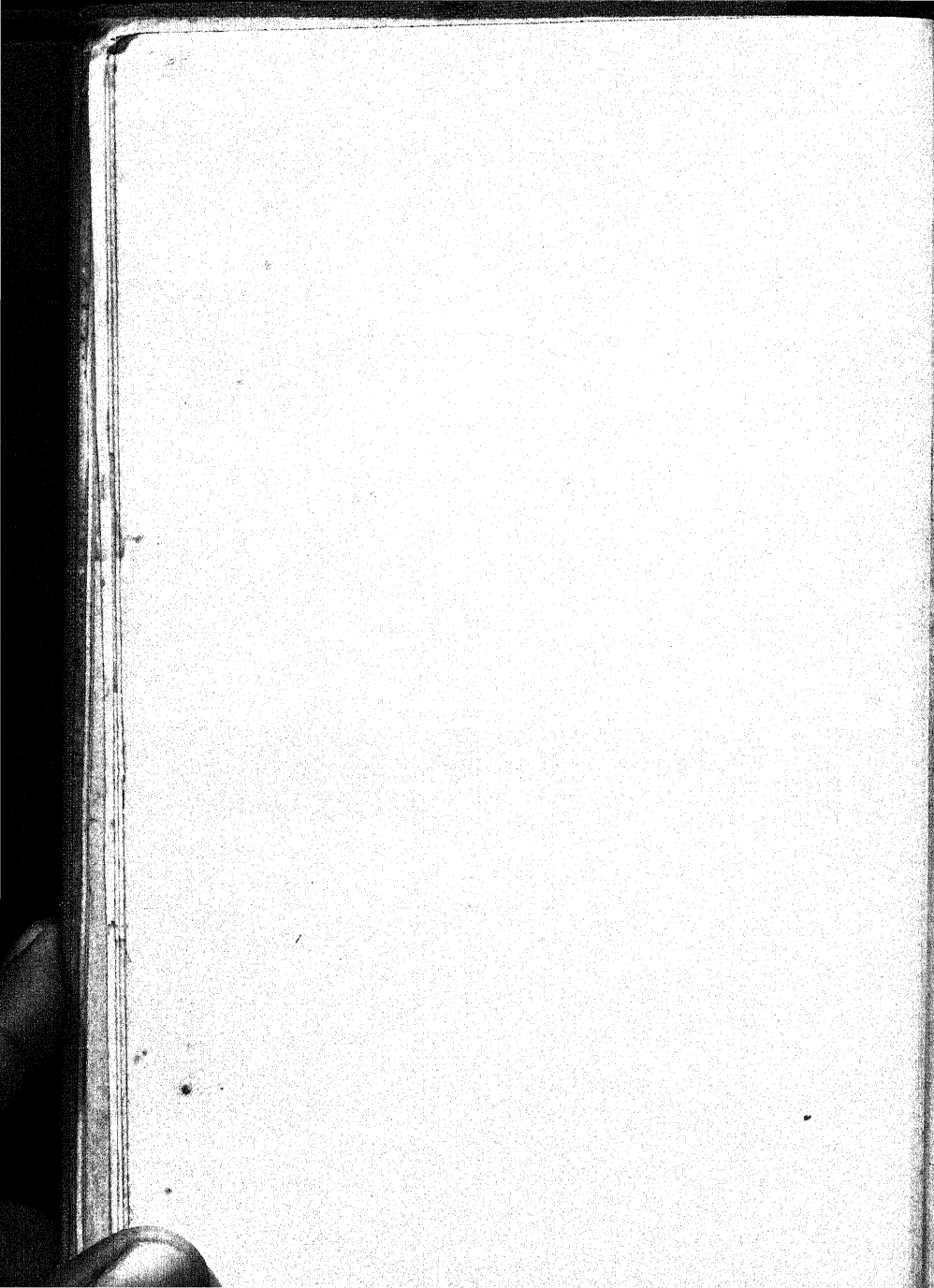
Quotations from Shakespeare are normally given in the Folio reading, or, where the lines are missing from that text, in the reading of an early Quarto. Since, however, I am not here concerned with textual problems in themselves, I have taken occasional liberties both with spelling and punctuation where these seemed to present undue difficulties.

ALLARDYCE NICOLL.

EAST LONDON COLLEGE,
August 1927.

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STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE

I

SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

FOOLS, they say, step in where angels fear to tread, and at first sight the proverb seems eminently applicable to those persons who dare to say anything more concerning the plays of Shakespeare; yet on second examination one realises that in this particular realm the angels and the fools are so mingled together, the trumpet-note of the one so confused with the gabbling of the other, that the danger of entry for a newcomer is lessened, if not entirely obviated. The Shakespearian critic may be lost in the overwhelming tumult of his companions, but those companions being angels as well as fools at least prevent the world from pointing the finger of accusing ridicule at him alone.

To escape that ridicule, however, the critic must attempt to say something new, or at best to put forward an interpretation of the plays with which he deals in such a way that that interpretation should gain hearing and credence. It is the greatness of Shakespeare which is the defence of the critics, for Shakespeare himself will always be greater than they—"still, out-topping knowledge"—baffling their individual efforts at explanation, and remaining a

mystery beyond human interpretation. No one critical volume on the dramatist's work can be final, but each, in proportion to the sagacity and intelligence of the author, will aid in the appreciation of the craft and of the aims of Shakespeare, while the concurrence of many subjective impressions by different writers may lead towards a deeper analysis of the meaning and value of the plays.

The fundamental problem in all æsthetic criticism of Shakespeare is to disentangle the true and the false, to differentiate those things which are of all time from those which have merely a temporary and topical significance, and to decide, as far as may be possible, upon the merits of the particular text presented to us. While, for his greater tragedies with which I purpose to deal in this course of lectures, I revere Shakespeare on this side idolatry as much as any, nay perhaps, pass farther into positive idolisation, nothing can obscure the fact that Shakespeare, even when he was penning those tragedies, was not always at his best. There are passages in *Hamlet* and in *Lear*, obviously from the hand of the master, which show a flagging of energy and which cannot be interpreted in the same way as we interpret the soliloquies of Iago or of Hamlet.

Aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus

is a truth as visible to us as it was to Horace centuries ago, nor can even Pope's witty idolatry—

Nor is it *Homer* nods but we that dream—

convince us that it is we who are in the wrong.

Shakespeare, however, dozes less than *Homer*.

The main defects in his plays come not from somnolence but from too great wakefulness. As an actor, as a sharer in his company, as a "housekeeper," he must eagerly have watched his public in an endeavour to catch just those tendencies which might make his plays popular successes. From the records of Shakespeare's life, and from a study of his plays in connection with reigning fashions in the theatres of his time, there is absolutely nothing to convince us that he was an artist uninterested in popular glory and success, and a careful examination of the plays shows that this attention to the contemporary theatre and audiences resulted in the introduction of certain elements not to be considered too closely for their value as integral parts of the plays. The topical satire of the child-players in *Hamlet*, the references to the King's Evil and to witchcraft in *Macbeth*, possibly the substitution of Albany, Burgundy and France for the Kings of Cambria and Gaul as they appeared in the old play of *King Leir*—these are all due to the watchfulness of the author. It is truly miraculous that a tragedy apparently thought of as a general compliment to a newly-reigning monarch should have grown into one of the most tremendous dramas of all time, but our wonder at the miracle should not blind us to the fact that there are many things in *Macbeth* which do not deserve equally detailed consideration with the rest. In addition to these topical references, we have to remember the passages and the types written for particular actors of the King's company. Quite evidently in the last years of the sixteenth century Shakespeare had been penning comedies for

two brilliant boy-actors—one slightly taller than the other, one witty and impudent, the other quieter and more reserved. Rosalind and Celia, Portia and Nerissa, Hero and Beatrice, are the records in art of those two nameless actors. In the same way, Burbage dominates the tragedies of the early seventeenth century. In spite of their several differences, there is something in common between all the heroes of the four great plays, a unity of conception which may be the result as much of the influence of the performer as of the author's fundamental conception of the tragic spirit. A weakness of the company in regard to boy-actors might well be called in to explain the comparative suppression of the feminine in these tragedies, although, in thus suppressing the feminine, Shakespeare was following that broad road of high tragic endeavour which stretches from the days of Æschylus to our own times.

It is thus obvious that, in discussing Shakespeare's dramas, there must be taken into consideration, not only the possibility of the dramatist's carelessness or exhaustion, but also the influence of the audience, of the special environment, and of the actors for whom the plays were first designed. Nor must the question of Shakespeare's text be lost sight of. It is impossible here to enter into the vexed problems raised by the science of bibliography, but it may be noted that, of the four great tragedies, only one, *Othello*, can be held to have come down to us in a fairly genuine form. The three versions of *Hamlet* and the probably cut or altered texts of *Lear* and *Macbeth* present peculiar problems of their own. Rarely are we given that freedom for the considera-

tion of Shakespeare's art such as is provided when we approach the work of a modern master. We are continually confronted with the possibility that what we have before us is not the dramatist's true work; that we may be judging him unrightly because of the paucity of matter presented to us.

From a consideration of the difficulties it may be fitting to turn to the methods of approach. Clearly our aim in criticising Shakespeare is to attempt an analysis of his purpose in the penning of the plays. For this end, simple character-studies, such as are popular among the commentators, are not sufficient. The character-study, necessary as it may be, must be related to the larger whole, to the exigencies of the drama, before it can prove of any definite value. Merely to explain Hamlet's character tells us nothing, for after all we are dealing, not with a man, but with a play. Before we learn anything of Shakespeare's larger purpose we must pass beyond and see, first, how that character influences the dramatic construction, and, secondly, how far it is itself determined by the preconceived plot or story of the play. Each work will, of course, be considered by itself. Thus Hamlet's nature and the nature of Othello seem both to have been conceived in their special terms in order to make possible the dramatic presentation of the pseudo-historical narrative of Belleforest and the fictional tale of Cinthio respectively. The construction of *King Lear*, on the other hand, betrays evidence of having been determined by the character of Lear himself. Misled by romantic critics with little *flair* for the theatre, a number of nineteenth and twentieth century Shakespearian commentators

have failed to think of the author of *Hamlet* other than as a great creator of character. Equally misled by enthusiasts for the stage, a number of our most recent critics have apparently regarded Shakespeare purely as a weaver of finely constructed dramas. The truth lies in a higher harmony. For Shakespeare character is interwoven inextricably with plot; and only by an examination of both, not separately but together, can we hope to reach even to the fringe of his final aim.

In this course of lectures it is my intention to emphasise this inevitable connection between character and plot, and at the same time to search for whatsoever clues Shakespeare may have left as to his own interpretation of the action passing before us. One of the most obvious of these is the careful consideration of the sources of the dramatic story; the excisions, the additions, the changes may well reveal some secrets. Such clues as these, however, are purely external and fortuitous. We may learn much from a comparison of *Macbeth* and Holinshed, but, after all, Shakespeare the dramatist knew that his audience could not so compare his play with the original narrative, and as a consequence the results of the comparison must always have a slight flavour of the study about them, a dangerous thing when we are dealing with the world of the theatre. The true clues to Shakespeare's own object lie within the dramas themselves. In every single play there are hints which, if interpreted aright, lead towards a fuller understanding of the artist's conception. The question may here arise of our right to enter thus into these minutiae of allusion and passing

reference. Do the critics, it may be asked, not find in Shakespeare's works more than ever he intended to place there? in their idolatry, are these critics not deceiving themselves into finding things in his plays of which the author never dreamt? The answer of the psycho-analysts is self-evident; but we may, I think, find a reply on purely normal grounds. If those who object to what is often termed the super-criticism of Shakespeare's tragedies turn even to the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher in an endeavour to find opportunities there for this deeper analysis, they will discover that the opportunities and the materials are absent. Shakespeare stands alone because of this amazing depth and subtle suggestion in his masterpieces. It is true that we may never be certain that all the hints and suggestions we discern in his dramas were placed there by him with full and direct intent, but literary composition is a strange and peculiar thing, the artist often losing himself in the penning of his poem or in the delineation of his characters. At times he may write, not in full consciousness, but almost unconsciously, ignorant of the exact words which he is placing on the paper before him. This process is not, however, to be attributed to inspiration, to the descent upon the poet's mind of super-mundane forces which he may style Muse or God or what he will, although the poet, feeling and realising its presence, may find no other word for the phenomenon; it is simply that the poet, his mind filled with the general outlines of his work, his brain teeming with fancies rich and strange, allows the subconscious part of his being to lead

him for a moment. With his conscious mind he may be pressing far ahead towards new themes and new characters; the precise words which he places on the paper may be put there without his being fully conscious of their import. The same or a similar phenomenon regularly occurs in the theatre. It has often been noted that the playhouse appreciation of a drama does not accord absolutely with the study appreciation of the same work, and the explanation seems to lie in the fact that the spectator subconsciously assimilates certain passing allusions, hints, and references which lose their force when considered coldly and critically by the light of the analysing intellect alone.

✓ It would anticipate too much to attempt an examination now of the clues which thus lead towards an elucidation of Shakespeare's innermost aim in the penning of his plays. Two examples may serve for the rest. In *Othello* the words "honesty" and "honest" run like a keynote throughout the harmony of the play. Applied in a diversity of tones and significations, these mark the very purpose and central import of the drama, rightly interpreted giving colour to the characters of Iago and Othello and Desdemona. Any study of the tragedy must take its starting-point from a consideration of their meaning. The second example may be taken from *Hamlet*. Three or four times in the course of the play we are given references to Hamlet's "ambition." Shakespeare in these references would appear to have been striving to present to us a certain clue towards the interpretation of the Prince's character, and perhaps the clue is uncon-

sciously assimilated in the theatre where it is lost sight of in the closet.

In addition to these spoken clues, there are the clues which lie in Shakespeare's silences. It may appear at first sight that to lay emphasis on what Shakespeare did not say in his plays for the purpose of obtaining a true appreciation of character, plot, and aim is the height of ridiculous absurdity. A momentary reflection, however, will show that the absurdity is not, but only seems, present. Obviously in a drama only a certain section of life can be shown, and of that section of life, chosen because of its important bearing upon the development of some particular action, only a very minute portion may be portrayed upon the stage. As in the cinema, so in the theatre, we are shown in fleeting glimpses a series of pictures revealing the dominant and most significant actions of a series of selected *dramatis personæ*. That which passes between the presentation of one scene and the presentation of another is necessarily concealed from our view; yet, if we are to regard the *dramatis personæ* as living persons, as we must if we are fully to appreciate the particular drama in which they appear, we must think of them, not as ceasing to be between every successive picture, but as having a continuous life from one scene to another. Moreover, we must presume that these characters will meet and talk with one another, will *act*, beyond the restricting walls of the scene. By narration, the favourite device of the Greek and Renaissance stages, some of these actions and conversations may be told to us. Again one or two examples may be necessary to make the argument

clear. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare would obviously have destroyed the balance of his play had he shown Hamlet on shipboard, breaking the seals of the letters and forging new documents destined to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to execution. Instead of doing so, he made Hamlet narrate the whole incident to Horatio. This is a clear case of events passing beyond the stage being shown to us through the lips of the actor himself. More allusive are the references in *Macbeth* to the newly-made King's murderous propensities. We have been shown Duncan murdered—at least we have seen the preparations for the murder and the reeking daggers; we have been shown the killing of Banquo and of Lady Macduff. To have proceeded further heaping murder upon murder would have destroyed Shakespeare's aim in the drama. Nor could he very well have made Macbeth himself tell of these deeds. As a consequence, he employs one of the other characters to make passing reference to the widows and orphans made daily by Macbeth's murderous fury. Reaching still deeper into the region of allusion and reference, we may pause on Lady Macbeth's receipt of her husband's letters. To have shown Macbeth and his wife deliberately planning the destruction of Duncan before the appearance of the witches would not only have ruined the balance of *Macbeth*, but would have taken away from that power of suggestiveness which is one of the chief qualities of the tragedy. Shakespeare has accordingly inserted hints sufficient to assure us that (1) Macbeth and his wife had early talked of securing the throne, and (2) had spoken of the possibility of murder. Neither informs us in so

many words of this fact; but, by piecing together the scattered points of evidence left to us, we can see that this was the impression which the dramatist intended to create in our minds.

A consideration of these examples will have prepared us for an appreciation of still more subtle allusions and dramatic devices. The pure silences in the Shakespearian tragedies are of two kinds, each with a different aim. First, there is the silence on the stage itself. Recent study of Shakespeare's plays has established beyond a shadow of doubt that he had a perfect sense of the theatre. Rarely, if ever, in his maturer dramas does he leave an actor purposelessly with nothing to say or do. Frequently, however, he lets an actor stand throughout a scene without speaking, for a definite dramatic purpose: to show a certain mood working within him. That mood is generally reflection or watchfulness. Examples may again be taken from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. When Hamlet stands silent at the ghost's speech and then bursts into a rhodomontade of furious bombast, we feel that Shakespeare wished to show his hero plunged in reflection and suddenly awakened out of that reflection as out of a trance. So, too, when Hamlet listens to Horatio's account of the ghost's appearance, and replies with inconsequent nothings, he is intended by Shakespeare to be in a state of profound or bewildered meditation. In the same way, Horatio's silence while Hamlet speaks to Osric, or while the prince raves over Ophelia's grave, betrays his watchfulness, as does the silence of Banquo when Duncan is discovered lying in his gore. Indeed, it may almost be accepted

as an axiom that when some chief character breaks from loquacity to a silence broken only by monosyllables, or by piercing or inconsequent questions, that that character is intended to be either in a state of reflective meditation or of extreme watchfulness. On the correct interpretation of these phenomena must naturally depend to a large extent a true interpretation of the play as a whole. Besides this, there is the silence of a character off the stage, not revealed on Shakespeare's part by any direct allusion or reference. One may take again a concrete example. Horatio disappears from the scene of *Hamlet* for over two acts, but when he reappears it is in the guise of a trusted confidant, and, moreover, as a slightly sceptical deterrent upon Hamlet. Shakespeare never declares so much, but are we not permitted to get beyond the actual scenes, and, by the aid of Horatio's words actually given to us, to interpret if we may his actions and influence thus half-concealed by the dramatist? This is one type of silence off the stage. Another is the silence of the hero. Quite frequently, so frequently as to become almost a "law" with Shakespeare, when one of his heroes is cut out of the drama for any length of time, it is to reveal a change in his character. Thus Hamlet, after departing for England and leaving the stage free for Laertes, Ophelia, Claudius and Gertrude, reappears in an entirely altered spirit. His continual harping on "It is no matter" reveals a changed mood in him which coincides with and is partly caused by Ophelia's death. Macbeth, too, vanishes for a time, and he also is altered. His consciousness of wasted effort, his wistful looking

back on things that were or might have been, display the tremendous torment through which his soul has passed. Lear in the same way disappears after the heath scenes, and his re-entry coincides with his awaking to sanity; another absence from the stage is followed by his altered spirit at the close of the fifth act. Between these entries we must presume much. Hamlet's soliloquies on board ship are not spoken for us with audible voice; Macbeth's crimes are not shown to our sensual eyes; Lear's moments of soul-tormenting madness are not openly revealed. Our imagination, as with all great works of art, must supply the many gaps between the known and the known.

Considered in this way, the unrevealed or the unknown in Shakespeare is seen to have as great an importance as the known and the revealed. Those who stay on what is said only will gain a one-sided or false view of the author's final conception of his play and of the characters in that play. Coupled with these clues, visible and to be imagined, goes, too, a number of dramatic devices which may be but briefly summarised. The tragic irony of which Shakespeare's dramas are full is often placed at those points which demand most careful scrutiny. The tragic irony in Duncan's first words, in the conversation of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, in the words of Desdemona and Brabantio—all of these illuminate the salient parts of *Macbeth* and of *Othello*. In exactly similar manner that peculiar dramatic trick of Shakespeare's—the repetition of some word or phrase—helps not only to give dramatic poignancy and interpretation of character,

but to draw attention to features most important for a consideration of the drama as a whole. The heart-wrung repetitions of Macduff, the emphasis on the handkerchief in *Othello*, that on the marriage of Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the similar effect presented by Cordelia's words over the newly-awakened Lear, all serve to function in this manner. The more we study Shakespeare, the more we shall find that, in spite of his universality and his variety, he employed much the same effects in different plays to secure the same or similar ends. It is on the correctness of our analysis of these effects that the truth of our final examination of Shakespeare's conception of tragedy in general, and of his tragedies in particular, will ultimately rest.

In referring to Shakespeare's conception of tragedy it may be well to outline, in briefest form, what that tragic conception seems to have been. The first thing we note, when we study the separate dramas from this point of view, is that each play seems to be in its own manner an experiment in a particular medium hitherto untried. *Hamlet*, besides having its strangely hesitating action, is peculiar in showing only one figure of true tragic magnitude. *Othello*, undoubtedly the most powerfully constructed of all Shakespeare's dramas, is unique in its form, the long exposition leading towards a climax and catastrophe rushed into the last few scenes. In *Lear* there is to be found a reversion to the chronicle-history plan of dramatic composition and the adoption of a hero who, after the opening of the play, ceases to have any direct influence on the development of the action. *Macbeth* stands by itself as depicting as its

hero a man who has sinned trebly and who yet retains the sympathy of the audience, and so providing what seems to be a swifter dramatic movement than that given in the other three plays. Reading these tragedies, therefore, we might hazard the suggestion that Shakespeare, moving to tragedy from the realms of romantic comedy and of the chronicle-history play, was trying the various stops of his instrument in an endeavour to test its full capabilities, while at the same time, consciously or unconsciously, he held in his mind his final conception of what he was seeking in his tragic art.

In this final conception of tragedy a careful distinction must be made between two qualities, or two aspects, which Shakespeare in all his dramas seems to have held ever in view. In considering these, Shakespeare the actor, the shareholder, and the "housekeeper," becomes of prime importance. The themes of practically all these four tragedies are sensational. In *Hamlet*, the ghost, the revenge-motive, the madness of Ophelia, the madness or semi-madness of the hero, the graveyard scene, the final catastrophe—all are cast in the forms of the most blatant melodrama. *Macbeth* has its witches, its ghosts and apparitions, its murder in a darkened castle, the thrilling sight of Lady Macbeth's walking in her sleep. The drunken scene in *Othello*, the riot on the battlements and the villainy of Iago, all have the same features; while Lear's madness, the tumultuous scene on the heath, the blinding of Gloucester, present characteristics in no wise less sensational and melodramatic. This is the tragic theme which, on the surface, seems most to have

attracted the attention of playgoers; it is this assuredly which made for Shakespeare his contemporary fame, and which has retained those plays on the acting list long after the dramas of his companions have been forgotten, save by a few scholars and poets interested in the Elizabethan stage. Shakespeare seems to have been intent on making all his plays popular successes by introducing into them themes that should arouse even the most mentally inert spectator, by presenting a rich series of excitements to the most apathetic audience. Considered from this point of view his great tragedies are nothing but successfully written melodramas, calculated to appeal to tastes not over-refined and not always over-civilised. There can be no opportunity, on the one hand, of striving to "defend" Shakespeare by showing that his plots are among the finest that could possibly have been secured by a dramatist; or, on the other, of deprecating his choice of subject-matter by styling him careless, by imagining him as thoughtlessly fixing his fancy here or there on some chance-begotten ancient chronicles or Italian *novelle*. All the research into his sources points to the fact that he considered his plot carefully before he commenced writing; that he read many versions of the original stories; and that, so far from being careless in his choice, he adopted his themes only after an intimate examination of the tastes of his audience. Yet these themes are often seen to be not of the finest possible texture. There are impossibilities in them often, and not impossibilities such as, to employ Aristotle's famous distinction, have been made highly probable; there are

weaknesses in the structure when we consider the tragedies from the loftiest points of view; there is a crudity frequently co-existing with an innate refinement, a confusion of forces which has sorely troubled the more honest of his commentators.

The first main point to note concerning Shakespeare's conception of tragedy is, then, the fact that he strove to display themes essentially stirring and often melodramatic, and that his primal thought was dramatic effectiveness. Obviously, however, this is only the outward framework; beyond and within the external sensationalism Shakespeare has placed a more subtle, a more poetical, and a less tangible tragic spirit. The two aspects must at one and the same time be kept distinct and treated together. They run parallel with one another, coalescing often, yet distinct in their offices. They resemble the two rhythms in the dramatist's own blank verse. Just as on the surface there is a regular succession of alternating weak and strong syllables, with the regular beat of the line's five stresses, and below a more perfect music, a melody perceived aright only when the regular rhythm is broken in pieces and the inner melody freed of the fetters which imprison its more delicate essence; so the inner melody, the inner tragic spirit, makes perfect art and beauty of the sensational texture of the tragic plays.

The varied manifestations of this inner spirit are largely responsible for the impression that each play is a symphony on some definite abstract theme. We may thus call *Othello* a drama of deception and of self-deception, *Macbeth* a drama of ambition, *Lear*

a drama of headstrong passion and false pride, *Hamlet* a drama of indecision; and, if we pass further, *Coriolanus* a drama of social pride, *Antony and Cleopatra* a drama of unlawful love, *Timon of Athens* a drama of misanthropy. That this abstract idea operated on Shakespeare's mind when he was creating those plays I do not personally doubt for a moment, although he was too great an artist to allow an abstract idea such as this to dominate his work. In general it might be said that in Shakespeare's mind such an idea seems to have been necessary in order to give that unity of tone visible in every great tragedy. In this he was but ranging himself alongside those great tragic dramatists of Greece and of other lands whose masterpieces, too, present the concrete expression of some ideal or of some human passion or failing.

With this abstract atmosphere—or, more correctly, with this impression conveyed to us that the whole play is but the visualisation or realisation of an intangible essence—moves the inner conflict of Shakespeare's dramas. This inner conflict exists alongside the outer conflict, but rarely coincides with that. In *Hamlet* the outer conflict takes the form of Hamlet's relations to his uncle, to Polonius, and to Laertes; the inner struggle is to be discovered within Hamlet's own mind as a conflict between his desire for revenge, perhaps, as will be shown, his love, passion, and his ambition, and the moral scruples or "religion" which withholds him from moving to his set purpose. *Othello* presents an outer struggle in the persons of Othello, Iago, Cassio, and Desdemona; but the inner conflict is to be sought for

in the mind of Othello, and, as I believe, in the mind of Iago. So in *Lear* there are two quite clearly marked groups of characters, ranging themselves respectively under the banners of Right and of Wrong, or of Good and of Evil, and the clash of these two groups introduces a thrilling outer conflict; but the inner struggle, again, is to be discovered in the mind of Lear, alone. *Macbeth* presents outer conflicts in the relations between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and between the former and Macduff; but once more it is the struggle between ambition and conscience in the hero's mind which provides the inner and higher tragedy. The blunt statement as to the nature of these several forms of conflict falls, of course, very far from the truth; the mental or emotional contending forces are much more subtly delineated and interposed than such a brief summary would indicate; but the fact remains that such a conflict within the mind of the hero would seem to have been for Shakespeare one of the prime essentials in his conception of tragedy.

This inner conflict he seems normally to have confined to one figure in each drama. Even in *Othello* and in *Macbeth*, where the struggle is found in other than the central figure, there is an exception made in favour of the hero. In the former play, although there is some sort of conflict in Iago's mind, Iago is presented as too fully developed along his own particular lines to display anything of the passionate struggle visible in Othello's soul, while in the latter there is a fundamental difference between the forms of conflict revealed by Macbeth and by his wife. With Macbeth the struggle is a

simple one. He aims at the crown, but his conscience reproves him. Lady Macbeth, at the opening of the play, is single-minded; no conscience enters in to stay her hand. It is only after the climax in the murder of Duncan that her force of will begins to fail and her more sensitive being rises to control her nature. This phenomenon may serve to illustrate Shakespeare's endeavour to secure in his tragedies unity of tone and of effect. In comedy there may be mingling of many moods, dull artisans meeting with Theban aristocrats; but in tragedy the emotional effect must be single and untouched by any outer influence. Whether Shakespeare felt it consciously or not, plainly the artist soul in him shrank from dissipating the emotional effect of his plays by providing, as Jonson only too often did, rival spheres of interest. To have shown Laertes or Horatio as anything but mono-emotioned would have been, in effect, to destroy *Hamlet*.

As a further means towards securing this unity of effect, Shakespeare has not only subjugated his minor figures in the presence of one who gives his name to the particular tragedy, he has, as well, rendered the feminine portion subordinate to the masculine. If we sum up the women characters of his four great tragedies we find them largely unimportant in comparison with those who fill the romantic comedies of his earlier or later years. The Queen in *Hamlet* is little more than a puppet, and Ophelia, for all her pathetic appeal, a shadow; Emilia is a useful servant and confidante, Desdemona a fitting foil for Othello and tool in the hands of Iago; Regan and Goneril are undistinguished monsters, and Cor-

✓ delia a figure, boldly sketched in, it is true, but of minor importance when compared with Lear; Lady Macbeth occupies a central position, but her qualities, at least when we see her first and when she plays her part in driving forward the action of the tragedy, are largely masculine. There have been many attempts to vindicate these women of Shakespeare's tragedies; countless critics have spoken of innocence and trust and chastity, have dragged in violets and roses and lilies to form pleasing similes; but all such theorisings and all analyses of their characters seem to be useless, in that Shakespeare, evidently in full consciousness, was driving them from the principal positions in his plays and deliberately limning their psychologies in the boldest or in the faintest of outlines. Desdemona and Cordelia certainly, by their natures, by their inherent weaknesses, aid in precipitating the tragic climax in their respective dramas, but their parts are insignificant when compared with those of others. ✓ It is only because Shakespeare's minor characters are so much finer than even the chief characters of contemporary playwrights that critics have found space for analysing the temperaments of these women figures, losing thereby, it would seem, that true relativity of prospect which is essential if we are to judge his work aright. ✓

One other peculiarity of Shakespeare's inner tragic conflict must be commented upon. His heroes, one and all, have that particular mentality advised by Aristotle; they are all men of high nobility ending in destruction caused by a failing, a fatal flaw, in their own characters. To this fatal flaw, however,

Shakespeare has added a peculiar element dependent upon the hero's relations to his environment. Hamlet is thus set in a position demanding will-power and the lack of moral scruple; he has no will-power and is troubled by conscientious doubts. Othello is placed in a position which demands keen observation and subtle intelligence; he has neither. In Lear, common sagacity and appreciation of character were required, and Lear lamentably lacks both. For Macbeth to have withstood his temptations he would have had to be content and unambitious, but Macbeth is filled with longing for a crown, and continually desires aggrandisement. Let us change their respective positions, and at once—handy-dandy, which is the justice and which the thief? Hamlet in Othello's place and Othello in Hamlet's would have meant the entire disappearance of any tragic action. Shakespeare, then, seems constantly to have been impressed by, and to have striven to impress us with, this tragic relationship between the hero and his surroundings. His object, undoubtedly, was to intensify the fate sense in his dramas. His tragedies are not mere tragedies of character. Character may be, as some critics have asserted, destiny for him as for Novalis, but that is only part of the truth. Shakespeare's conception of tragedy involved, over and above character, the suggestion of fatal forces, operating on the actions of mankind, placing these men of power, nobility, strength, and courage in just those situations with which they were incapable of dealing. The minds of these characters are left free, but their desires and their thoughts are only too frequently

warped out of their original form. Their thoughts belong to them, but the ends are none of their own.

It is this fate sense, subtly introduced in this manner and intensified by other more supernatural elements, which most commentators of Shakespeare are inclined to neglect. In place of the "Character is Destiny" theory we might state as Shakespeare's final doctrine "Character and Destiny." The ghosts in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, the many references to the divine in *Lear*, the free use of tragic irony in *Othello*, all call forth visions of the supermundane. It were needless here to enter into the question of Shakespeare's strange and elusive impartiality; the fact alone may be noted that, while his tragedies depend for their very being on the impression of fatal forces over and above the characters, Shakespeare hardly ever enunciates in so many words his belief in the operation of divine or diabolic presences. This question of the supernatural and of fate in Shakespearian tragedy is, of course, intimately connected with the more abstract problem, dealt with at length by Professor Bradley, of the final views on life of Shakespeare himself. He involves his good and bad characters alike in universal destruction; there is no question in his plays of a more systematised poetic justice. What then, it has been asked, was his object in writing his dramas? The question, it would seem, is largely futile. His treatment of Falstaff in his earlier days, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in his tragic period, and of Antigonus in his later age, shows him not to have entered so fully into his characters as many of the senti-

mental commentators have cared to make out. His characters are the characters of his imagination, and he stands, godlike, apart. Only the lesser dramatist who has not this power of impartiality thinks of poetic justice; Shakespeare, from his higher position, reflects the whole universe, and does not attempt to inculcate any petty moral by saving the good characters and destroying the evil. Moreover, while we feel in his plays the presence of good and evil, while we feel that he himself has sympathy for the nobility and the grandeur of life, we can hardly say that in Shakespeare's view the gods are on the side of the good. If we judge from his plays, as we can judge only from his plays, we should say that his attitude, even when he employs the supernatural for artistic and tragic effect, is distinctly rationalistic. He dogmatizes not at all concerning the forces above us; if anything, that which is above us and above his characters is shown as a fate implacable and severe. The good and the noble in his tragedies exist for themselves, not for any outside god or heavenly power.

If no poetic justice of the cruder sort appears in his plays, the truly good, however, or those who have some elements of good in their natures, are given one award before their end. A true conception of their own actions, painful as that may be, sheds light into their souls. This new light generally takes the form of a fresh attitude towards life which banishes part of the evil in their beings. Thus, Hamlet rises from the soul-torment and from the self-condemnation into which he had sunk up to a sphere of thought where man's actions are regarded

sub specie eternitatis in the light of the illimitable spaces of the stars; Lear gains a new manhood after his mental and physical torture; and Othello stands mazing on the wonder and nobility of life even while he sees before him the cynical smile of Iago. Macbeth, villain though he be, realises a new beauty in existence when he thinks of all that might have been—the friends and the esteem and the sincerity which by his own action he has irredeemably lost. The motto of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes might well be that exquisite verse which Milton saw fit to place on the title-page of *Comus*:

*Eheu! quid volui misero mihi? Floribus austrum
Perditus.*

It is the consciousness of error and the realisation that there is

*Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria,*

which is the sad reward of that terrible refinement as of fire through which Shakespeare's heroes pass.

This fresh attitude towards life, which colours the final moments of all Shakespeare's heroes, provides a peculiar atmosphere for each play. While we have not in the tragedies that strange transcendental idealism which finds its fullest expression in *The Tempest*, we are given a mood wherein the whole of life becomes, after all, but a gay or a melancholy pageant. The melodramatic stories, the crude things of this earth, seem to vanish, and a solemn stillness, as of forces far beyond the troubled story, holds the air. It is from this final atmosphere of

idealistic calm that there arises the great power of Shakespeare's dramas. We are not left crushed or pessimistic, for we are in the presence of an eternal mystery. The weary calm of Hamlet, Othello's great last soliloquy, Lear's innocent awakening, the tired musings of Macbeth—on these, and not on death alone, the curtain-folds sweep down.

II

THE TRAGEDIE OF HAMLET,
PRINCE OF DENMARKE

TURNING from an examination of the methods by which we may approach the tragedies and of such elements as seem common to all, I propose to take the four greater dramas of Shakespeare's maturity, and, analysing source, character, and plot, attempt a survey of the effect which each was intended to have upon an audience. In starting with *Hamlet* we commence with a play which introduces most complexity in the presentation of character and of tragic aim. It is certainly noteworthy that Shakespeare, as he advanced in his art, paid ever more and more attention to simplicity, and probably the feeling that the more complex theme of *Hamlet* might lead towards dissipation of tragic energy caused the dramatist to subordinate all the other characters to the person of the hero-prince. Possibly, too, Shakespeare realised the difficulties inherent in the story, this theme of blood and of revenge, with a hero and a villain, a ghost and madness, closing on a

stage covered with dead bodies. If he was in any way to raise this subject-matter to the levels of high art, obviously his only sure plan was to give such delicate touches to the character of the chief figure that he should appear lifted above the normal level, that the other persons, in comparison with him, should be mere puppets playing their parts in this melodramatic story. The consciousness of this necessity no doubt came to Shakespeare only at a comparatively late date. There is every reason to believe that his first *Hamlet* was written and produced in the sixteenth century, that it saw several revisals before the final version preserved in the Second Quarto of 1604, and that we can trace with some exactitude the progress of the story through the *Histoires tragiques* (1576) of Belleforest, the German *Bestrafte Brudermord* (a manuscript dated 1710, but showing an early version of the dramatic theme), the First Quarto (1603) and the Second Quarto (1604). It may be well, before approaching the later text, to see what development can be discerned in the three earlier versions.

Briefly, Belleforest's prose narrative tells how Horvendile and Fengon were made governors of the province of Ditmarse; how Horvendile married Geruth and had a son Hamblet; and how "after his marriage his brother Fengon slewe him trayterously, and married his brother's wife," Hamblet being then but a child. As the young prince grows up to manhood he finds that his uncle, who had committed his crime publicly, feared him as a possible avenger; so, in order to preserve his life, he adopts the guise of madness. Fengon is suspicious; one of his coun-

sellors whom he had sent to spy on the prince is killed by the pretended madman, and, partly as a result, the latter is despatched with two companions to England. Hamlet discovers that these companions carry letters bidding the English King put him to death, forges new documents, gets the companions executed, marries an English princess, returns to slay Fengon, and settles down as King of Denmark.

It is evident that we have here the bare outline of the *Hamlet* story; these bare outlines receive some elaboration in *Der bestrafte Brudermord*. The uncle is here called Erico, Sigrie is the Queen, and Hamlet the hero. Horatio makes his appearance, as does Ophelia, daughter of the Royal Chamberlain, Corambus, whose son is Leonhardus. Fundamentally the plot of this German version moves along the lines of the later Shakespeare drama. There is a scene on the battlements; the ghost appears and Hamlet makes his companions swear silence. It is to be observed, also, that here the murder has been a secret one, committed, not when Hamlet was a child, but only a short time previously. Hamlet counterfeits madness, and his madness is thought by Corambus to arise from love of his daughter. Actors arrive, and the hero makes them present a play. He kills Corambus, and Ophelia goes mad. The end of the play, leading towards death by means of a poisoned rapier, is approximately as it is in the Quartos.

The version of 1603 presents a striking similarity to this German rendering, although here, for the first time, we reach truly Shakespearian conceptions. In this text Corambus is retained as Corambis, but Marcellus makes his appearance alongside Horatio.

The language is largely a condensation and mangled version of that of the Second Quarto, but there are certain peculiarities in the action which deserve our close attention, for they may serve to explain some otherwise almost inexplicable elements in the standard *Hamlet*. First, we may note a few passages, mainly affecting the characters of Ophelia and the Queen, which do not appear in the later text. Special stress is here laid on the dangers inherent in the love of Hamlet for Corambis' daughter. Instead of giving the girl vague and general advice, Laertes descends to particularised warning:

My necessities are inbarkt, I must aboard,
 But ere I part, marke what I say to thee:
 I see Prince *Hamlet* makes a shew of loue
 Beware *Ophelia*, do not trust his vowes,
 Perhaps he loues you now, and now his tongue,
 Speakes from his heart, but yet take heed my sister,
 The Chariest maide is prodigall enough,
 If she vnmaske hir beautie to the Moone.
 Vertue it selfe scapes not calumnious thoughts,
 Belieu't *Ophelia*, therefore keepe a loose
 Lest that he trip thy honor and thy fame.

This is a sufficiently startling divergence from the somewhat long-winded advice concerning "the perfume and suppliance of a minute" as in the 1604 text. It is important, too, to notice the different phrasing of Corambis' and of Polonius' words a few lines further on. Whereas in the Quarto of 1604 Polonius merely states that

Tis tolde me he hath very oft of late
 Guen priuate time to you, and you yourselfe
 Have of your audience beene most free and bountious.

In the Quarto of 1603 Corambis puts his thoughts in direct language,

Mary wel thought on, 'tis giuen me to vnderstand,
That you haue bin too prodigall of your maiden presence
Vnto Prince Hamlet.

As regards the Queen, we note a divergence even more apparent. There is, in the earlier version, not the slightest question as to her innocence. "Alas," she cries to her son,

Alas, it is the weaknesse of thy braine,
Which makes thy tongue to blazon thy hearts grieve:
But as I haue a soule, I sweare by heauen,
I neuer knew of this most horride murder. . . .
Hamlet, I vow by that maiesty,
That knowes our thoughts, and lookes into our hearts,
I will conceal, consent, and doe my best,
What stratagem soe're thou shalt deuise,

while later in the play she appears as the *confidante* of the faithful Horatio:

Hor. Madame, your sounne is safe arriv'de in *Denmarke*,
This letter I euen now receiv'd of him,
Whereas he writes how he escap't the danger,
And subtle treason that the king had plotted. . . .

Queene. Then I perceiue there's treason in his lookes
That seem'd to sugar o're his villainie. . . .
O faile not, good *Horatio*, and withall, commend me
A mothers care to him, bid him a while
Be wary of his presence, lest that he
Faile in that he goes about.

Whether these words were Shakespeare's or another's does not really matter; the important thing to

notice is that in the earlier version of the drama such was the speech of the Queen.

The omissions in the 1603 Quarto are of equal value for a study of Shakespeare's final purpose. The grave-diggers take not the place they do in 1604, so that the intensification of Hamlet's melancholy philosophy by contrast with their rude jests is absent. Throughout the play, indeed, this melancholy philosophy is subdued, so that the drama, while it contains the outlines of Hamlet's later psychology, is by no means so deeply intellectual and profound.

These brief notes concerning the various versions of *Hamlet* may serve as a prelude to a general study of the standard text. In this general study, a word must first be said concerning some of the main features of *Hamlet* as a tragic drama. (Like *Macbeth*, and to a certain extent like *Othello*, *Hamlet* stands apart from *Lear* in that the hero forms the complete centre of all the dramatic action. He it is who precipitates the crisis and who is responsible for the catastrophe in the end. No other person aids considerably in the development of the plot. Claudius, who is in this way the most important minor figure, hardly does anything of serious consequence. He certainly attempts to secure Hamlet's execution, and he suggests the poisoning of the rapier; but these actions are insignificant when we compare them with the deeds of Goneril and of Regan. Everything fundamental in the tragedy, we may say, springs from the motives of Hamlet himself and from their resultant consequences. Like *Macbeth*, too, and unlike *Othello* and *Lear*, *Hamlet* presents

ghost

a visible supernatural element on the stage. (This probably was due to the fact that *Hamlet* was an earlier work. The witches seem to have been introduced into *Macbeth* in 1606 because of James's interest in demonology. Shakespeare, if we may judge of his opinions from his practice, does not seem to have favoured in later life the direct introduction of the supernatural into tragedy, and it is noticeable how he has endeavoured in these two plays to minimise the materiality of his ghostly visitants.

One special peculiarity confronts us in our contemplation of *Hamlet*, and that is, that in this play no one is thoroughly evil. Claudius is a villain of a kind, but his villainy seems rather to arise from his weakness, and he has many pricks of conscience:

Oh my offence is ranke, it smels to heauen,
It hath the primall eldest curse vpon't,
A Brothers murther. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharpe as will. . . .

Oh, what forme of Prayer
Can serue my turne? Forgiue me my foule Murther:
That cannot be, since I am still possest
Of those effects for which I did the Murther.
My Crowne, mine owne Ambition, and my Queene.

These are not the thoughts of a true villain; they are the thoughts of a normally honest but weak-willed man who has sinned, and who, while repenting of his sin, has not the strength to put off its effects. The evil qualities of Claudius are sensuality, ambition, and boorishness, but he is not a villain. It may be suggested that perhaps one of the reasons why Shakespeare abandoned the device of making

Claudius is weak
& not a wicked man

Gertrude privy to Hamlet's plan was that this made more odious the character of her second husband. All the other characters in the drama are, in the main, without positive evil. In spite of the fact, then, that none of Shakespeare's tragedies is so full of melancholic pessimism, the struggle in *Hamlet* is not in reality a struggle of Good and Evil. Instead of being a tragedy of villainy and virtue, *Hamlet* is a drama of wit and folly. It is these intellectual, and not any moral, qualities which are opposed to one another.

When we consider that Shakespeare has concentrated nearly all his attention upon Hamlet himself, the question of the manner in which the dramatist conceived of his prime creation becomes all-important. It may be stated, in the first place, and stated quite dogmatically, that Shakespeare nowhere presents Hamlet as a sickly invalid, frail and beaten by the storms of cruder reality about him. This conception is purely the result of modern sentimentality. Shakespeare in all probability wrote Hamlet for Burbage, and Burbage, decidedly no weakling, must have acted the part with a robustness unknown to-day. Everywhere in the drama Hamlet is presented as a physically healthy type of manhood. He has nothing of the weakling's love of deference to be shown to him by others.

The same, my Lord,
And your poore Seruant euer,

says Horatio, and Hamlet's answer symbolises his whole being:

Sir, my good friend.

And so, when his companions, at the close of the same scene, with punctilious politeness declare to him:

Our duty to your Honour,

Hamlet dismisses their words with a

Your loues, as mine to you.

His highest praise for his father is not that he was "a goodly king," but that

He was a man, take him for all in all.

Character x
Hamlet, too, is presented to us as a man full of physical courage, by no means as the frail shadow of a melancholy Hegelian. His language to his friends when they attempt to stay him from following the ghost has the note of courage and strength in it:

Vnhand me, Gentlemen:

By Heau'n, Ile make a Ghost of him that lets me:

I say away!

x
Before the ghost he is unshaken by any fear. He it is who, at the head of the seamen, boards the pirate sloop. He runs his rapier into the moving arras without the slightest compunction. As a fine swordsman he is esteemed by all; Ophelia thinks of soldiership as one of his prime qualities; and Fortinbras, no man to admire mere bookish virtue, honours him as a comrade-in-arms:

Let foure Captains

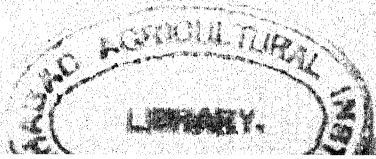
Beare *Hamlet* like a Soldier to the Stage,

For he was likely, had be beene put on

To have prou'd most royally :
And for his passage,
The Souldiours Musicke, and the rites of Warre
Speake lowdly for him.

Nor can we overlook Shakespeare's own references to Hamlet's person. For him Hamlet is "fat," and, when his energies are overtaxed, he is "scant of breath." Shakespeare, it must be remembered, was no closet dramatist barely visualising the figures he had created, and accordingly we have to accept his words at their literal value. Hamlet for him is a robust soldier, accustomed to manly exercise, but a trifle out of form owing to his sojourn at the Danish court, and hence stout, like the bearded Burbage. Too much cannot be said against the popular conception of Hamlet as a thin, emaciated figure, immaculately garbed in black and discoursing more like a medieval saint than an Elizabethan gentleman or a Danish prince.

From this study of the physical Hamlet, we must turn to that which forms the very core of the tragedy, the mental and spiritual Hamlet. Obviously the first thing which strikes us is the fact that the hero delays so long in achieving his revenge. A son is shown his father murdered; he knows the murderer; and yet, while apparently feeling it his duty to avenge his sire, he delays his action and then eventually executes his purpose almost by chance. If, we feel, we can reach the secret of this dallying we shall have reached the secret of the drama as well. Before actually coming to a consideration of this problem, however, one thing must be noted. An audience, witnessing *Hamlet* on the stage, is not



obsessed by such questioning as comes to a reader of the play. By them, the delay, while of course it is noted, is accepted as inevitable. It is only later, when quieter reflection enters in, that we come to consider in detail all the causes, real or imagined, which might be held to account for the retardation of the action. This phenomenon (the contrast between the views of spectator and of reader) is a common one in Shakespearian tragedy, and the following analysis is designed largely to explain the lack of doubt on the part of the audience.

Many are the theories which have been proposed to account for Hamlet's delay, the more important having been summarised in Professor Bradley's searching study of Shakespearian tragedy. Since the appearance of that volume Professor Stoll has sought to show that the action is delayed for the simple reason that the meagre plot would not otherwise have filled up five acts—a statement of fact rather than an analysis; for Shakespeare, being a great dramatist, obviously must have striven to make such a delay, necessary as it may have been, psychologically possible. The psycho-analytical theory, adumbrated by Freud and elaborated by Mr Ernest Jones, may, because of its implications, be dismissed without comment. It is our business to discover, not any involuntary anticipation of modern theories on Shakespeare's part, but what must have been his own conscious conception of Hamlet's character. The theory that Hamlet was deterred by some physical hindrance (as he was in Belleforest's version and in *Der bestrafte Brudermord*); the theory of Karl Werder that Hamlet's difficulty lay

in the proving publicly of Claudius' criminality; the theory that conscience held Hamlet back; the theory that reflection or meditation ruined Hamlet's nature (that held by Coleridge, Goethe, Ulrici, Klein, Hugo, Fischer, and a host of others); the theory that *Hamlet* is a study in melancholy—each of these, taken by itself, seems to provide insufficient explanation and to leave several serious *lacunæ* in the evidence. While keeping these in view, it may not be unprofitable to enter into an analysis of Hamlet's personality, *in so far as that personality is revealed upon the stage* by his own words or by those of his companions, and independent of any *a priori* theory which professes to explain his delay.

X We have already seen that Shakespeare presents Hamlet as a soldier, or with soldierly qualities, robust, royal or kingly in his demeanour, yet surprisingly democratic in his treatment of friends and servants. Unlike such a man as Fortinbras, however, Hamlet is a scholar, a student, a man of exceedingly fine intellect. Here a certain care must be exercised if we are to interpret his mind aright. Hamlet is a manly man, but he is not a man of the world. He has spent a great part of his life at the University of Wittenberg, and to it he looks as to an intellectual home. Obviously he is out of his element at Elsinore:

Wee'l teach you to drinke deepe, ere you depart,
he says in irony to Horatio, and later, on hearing the "ordnance shot off within":

The King doth wake to night, and takes his rouse,
Keepes wassels and the swaggering vpspring reeles,

And as he dreines his draughts of Renish downe,
 The kettle Drum and Trumpet thus bray out
 The triumph of his Pledge. . . .
 [But] to my mind, though I am native heere,
 And to the manner borne: It is a Custome
 More honour'd in the breach, then the obseruance. . . .
 This heauy headed reueale east and west
 Makes vs tradust, and taxed of other nations
 They clip vs drunkards, and with Swinish phrase
 Soyle our addition.

Claudius himself lets us know that Hamlet has had intentions of returning to his university:

For your intent
 In going backe to Schoole in Wittenberg,
 It is most retrograde to our desire.

Herein lies the major cause of his misery. He is not a recluse or a meagre philosopher; he is a robust man with a scholar's brain, who is out of touch with what is generally called reality. It is the sudden entry into the sordidness of life which shocks his whole being. Moreover, although he is highly intelligent and knows his own companions, Marcellus and Horatio, well enough, he has not the power of entering into the hearts of other people. He is distinctly unsuspecting of evil in the men around him, although circumstances allow him to see the evil in women. This is part of his philosophising tendency, and depends upon his lack of observation of life. He has known his mother evil and all women become so for him; he has known Horatio and Marcellus and his own father noble and good, and he is consequently incapable at first of attributing

to other men evil qualities not in those few with whom he is intimately acquainted.

He being remisse,
Most generous, and free from all contriuing,
Will not peruse the Foiles,

declares Claudius to Laertes, and this indeed seems an accurate summing-up of his nature. In one way Hamlet is a tragedy of sex, in that Hamlet, companioned only by himself and a few chosen friends, and knowing little of women, misconceives of the general nature of both.

This lack of knowledge of the world, however, sometimes causes in him intense uneasiness. He is conscious of it himself and this arouses in him a sense of the loneliness of his position.

They foole me to the top of my bent,
seems not the declaration of a pretended madman, but the aside of a troubled spirit, while

The time is out of ioynt: Oh cursed spight,
That euer I was borne to set it right,

is a cry from his very soul. He is cursed with thought, a man of power and energy and ability, and yet he stands among these denizens of Elsinore like a foreigner in a strange and unknown land.

This brilliant intellect and tendency to philosophy, therefore, coupled with his consciousness of physical ability, and leading towards unsuspiciousness as well as towards a certain uncomfortable feeling that he does not precisely know how others are looking at him; this habit of generalising from the known to the universal unknown; and this sense that his own

being is a thing of his own, and the thoughts of others are incapable of being divined by him—all this is the first secret of Hamlet's nature, a secret to the solution of which Shakespeare has left us ample clues. This is the basis on which we must explain his delay in action, but, evidently, it does not form any direct reason in itself for that delay.

The shock which comes to his peculiarly constituted nature through a too-sudden contact with reality has a threefold source. There is, first, his mother's marriage to his uncle; secondly, his own suspicion of foul play; and thirdly, his connection with Ophelia. These require especially careful consideration, for in these lies the prime secret of Hamlet's character as it is revealed in the play. His mother's marriage clearly has affected his mind deeply before ever he sees the ghost. His very first words,

A little more then kin, and lesse then kinde,

revealing in the melancholy pun Hamlet's own intellectual nature, strike a note which is emphasised again and again throughout the first part of the play. He links in his mind his mother's undue haste in marrying Claudius with her want of grief for the dead King. "Ay, madam, it is common," he answers to her remark that it is common for all things to die, and he rises almost to hysteria when she utters the word "seems"

Seemes Madam? Nay, it is: I know not Seemes:
'Tis not alone my Inky Cloake (good Mother)
Nor Customary suites of solemne Blacke,
Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,

No, nor the fruitfull Riuer in the Eye,
 Nor the dejected hauiour of the Visage,
 Together with all Formes, Moods, shewes of Griefe,
 That can denote me truly. These indeed Seeme,
 For they are actions that a man might play:
 But I haue that within, which passeth show;
 These, but the Trappings, and the Suites of woe.

See 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.
 The fullest utterance of this disgust is expressed in the first soliloquy, where we find for the first time Hamlet's tendency towards generalisation. He has witnessed one foul deed and the whole world grows foul to him. His mind dwells with horror on the sensuality of his mother and of the King, and his own flesh seems ugly and debased:

Oh that this too too solid Flesh, would melt,
 Thaw, and resolue it selfe into a Dew. . . .

That it should come to this:

But two months dead: Nay, not so much; not two,
 So excellent a King, that was to this

Hiperion to a Satyre. . . .

Heauen and Earth.

Must I remember: why she would hang on him,

As if encrease of Appetite had growne

By what it fed on; and yet within a month?

Let me not thinke on't: Frailty, thy name is woman.

The last phrase is of more than usual importance. At once, Hamlet has stepped from condemnation of his mother to condemnation of all womankind. What one had done, all might do. Two further points may be noted in this speech. Hamlet contemplates suicide, but is deterred by the "canon 'gainst self slaughter" fixed by "the Everlasting." This may or may not be a real reason for his refraining

from thus ending all his torment, but it is observable that in a later soliloquy, when his mind again returns to the same subject, the cause of his stayed hand is different:

To dye, to sleepe
 No more; and by a sleepe, to say we end
 The Heart-ake, and the thousand Naturall shockes
 That Flesh is heyre too? 'Tis a consummation
 Deuoutly to be wish'd. To dye to sleepe,
 To sleepe, perchance to Dreame; I, there's the rub,
 For in that sleepe of death, what dreames may come,
 When we haue shuffel'd off this mortall coile,
 Must give vs pawse.

The second point is the necessity which lies upon Hamlet of keeping silence:

But breake my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

On reading this soliloquy there seems to me to be more than at first sight meets the eye. Hamlet's grief for his father is too extravagant, his horror at his mother's marriage too pronounced; there lies, it would appear, something worse at the back of his mind.

The suspicion of foul play is the second great shock to his nature. That Hamlet had such suspicions before his father's spirit appeared to him, and that in all probability it is this secret thought, and not the lack of grief in his mother, that kept him silent, is proved by the later progress of the play. When Horatio tells him of the apparition, Hamlet is plunged into a sea of deep contemplation. Standing and listening to the words of his companions, he is suddenly, as it were, drawn within himself, and his

only remarks are needless questions or inconsequent answers:

Arm'd, say you? . . . From top to toe? . . . Then saw
 You not his face? . . . What, lookt he frowningly? . . .
 Pale, or red? . . . And fixt his eyes vpon you? . . .
 I would I had beene there . . . Very like, very like.
 Staid it long? . . . His Beard was grisly? no?

These are the remarks of a man who is so en-
 wrapped in his own meditations that the outside
 world becomes almost a blank to him. In the end
 he shakes off his burdensome reflections:

I doubt some foule play

crystallises the result of his thought. This is the
 scene which Shakespeare must have written most
 carefully, for on it depends the rest of the tragedy;
 and the clues left to us seem not far to seek. Hamlet
 has plainly shown both to his mother and to the
 King that he disapproves of their marriage; he has
 displayed his horror at the want of fitting sorrow;
 yet he has something on his mind which he may
 not utter aloud. On hearing of the ghost he is
 plunged in thought, thought which finds ultimate
 expression in his suspicion of foul play, he does not
 say even to himself by whom. A scene passes, and
 Hamlet has confronted his father's spirit. His first
 doubt is confirmed. "Murder!" he cries on hear-
 ing the ghost's first words, and then the famous

O my Prophetick soule: mine Vncle?

revealing for himself and for us the secret which has
 been hammering at his heart. The shock is com-

plete. He stands in utter silence during the long speech of the ghostly figure, and, when it vanishes, his words are the words of hysteria.

Then enters in the complication of his relations to Ophelia. Throughout all this time he has not spoken of her directly, although a suggestion of what lay in his mind is echoed in his cry to the ghost before its fatal secret is revealed:

Hast, hast me to know it,
That [I] with wings as swift
As meditation, or the thoughts of Loue,
May sweepe to my Reuenge.

Meditation is one great part of his life, for he is a scholar and a student, but he mingles in his unpremeditated speech this meditation with love, love which is explained to us in the following scenes. The consideration of the relations between the hero and Ophelia is a difficult one. There are three generally accepted views. (1) That Hamlet truly loved Ophelia, and never lost his love, but had to abandon that love at the command of the ghost. Hamlet's cruel treatment of Ophelia and the lack of any direct injunction are argument sufficient against this theory. (2) That Hamlet never was truly in love with her. Hamlet's own actions and his frenzy in the graveyard militate against this hypothesis. (3) That Hamlet loved Ophelia, but was suspicious of her as her father's agent. This view seems to leave neglected several salient points in the play.

We are, it seems to me, led towards wrong judgments here because of our sentimental enthusiasm

for Shakespeare's heroines. Ophelia dies in a scene of pathos, and we are rather inclined to strew on her the roses of forgetfulness than to analyse carefully her relations to the Prince. In any case, we are utterly precluded from reaching even the fringe of Shakespeare's purpose if we persist in echoing the meaningless rhapsodies of Mrs Jameson, where apostrophe takes the place of criticism:

Ophelia,—poor Ophelia! Oh far too soft, too good, too fair to be cast upon the briers of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life! What shall be said of her? for eloquence is mute before her! Like a strain of sad, sweet music which comes floating by us on the wings of night and silence, and which we rather feel than hear,—like the exhalation of the violet dying even upon the sense it charms,—like the snow-flake dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth,—like the light surf severed from the billow which a breath disperses,—such is the character of Ophelia.

which, of course, is precisely what it is not. No mere succession of similes and exclamation marks can produce a character-portrait, and even Vischer's vision of "a tender violet, a sincere, modest German maiden" carries us not one whit forward. What we must do, after all, is to get down to the text, and, treating Ophelia as Shakespeare treated her—as a fictional character and not as a real person of whom dead we can say *nihil nisi bonum*—ask ourselves several questions, among which the most important is that which concerns the manner in which Shakespeare first introduces her to our notice. It may be that the view put forward here may not meet with your approbation, but, since it serves to make

more comprehensible Hamlet's later actions, and since it accords with all the hints and suggestions provided by Shakespeare, it deserves at least honest analysis.

That Hamlet loved Ophelia there does not seem to be any reason to doubt. His reference to "the thoughts of love," uttered in a moment of extreme emotional strain, points to this, and his contemplation of "the pangs of despised love" in a later soliloquy has the same force. Ophelia herself tells us that Hamlet had "of late made many tenders of his affection" to her; nor can Hamlet's wild words over her corpse be treated as mere bombastic rant:

I lou'd *Ophelia*; fortie thousand Brothers
Could not (with all there quantitie of Loue)
Make vp my summe.

We may accept, then, that Hamlet loved passionately the daughter of Polonius. Something, however, made him turn away from her with disgust and treat her with a frenzied cruelty. For an explanation we must take both her words and his. Ophelia is weak and lacking in will. When Laertes speaks to her of Hamlet and tells her to count his protestations but as "a fashion, and a toy in blood," her only reply is "No more but so?" When he proceeds to lecture her further she merely warns him against condemnation of others and personal sin. Later, to her father she confesses that Hamlet has made love to her, stressing that that love was "in honourable fashion" and that Hamlet had given his love countenance "with almost all the holy vows of heaven." The ghost scene intervenes, and then we hear of Hamlet's appearance in the guise of a

distracted lover, but evidently with more passion than might be attributed to love alone. His letter is then read, and immediately after comes the conversation with Polonius. "Have you a daughter?" he asks, and on Polonius' reply, cries out:

Let her not walke i' th' Sunne: Conception is a blessing,
but not as your daughter may conceiue. Friend, looke
too't

The following act presents us with Hamlet's conversation with Ophelia herself. He dwells on the subject of honesty, and his remarks are coarse and bitter, so coarse that they have given much trouble to the orthodox commentators.

These are his words of and to her; now we may turn to the obverse of the picture. Madness, as Shakespeare must have noted, often speaks truths which sanity will not. The mad man or woman is seized by some one or two obsessions which dominate his or her whole mind. Polonius has been slain, and grief over her father's death is one of these obsessions in Ophelia's mind.

*He is dead and gone Lady, he is dead and gone. . . .
They bore him bare fac'd on the Beer,
Hey non nony, nony, hey nony :
[And on his grave raines many a teare].*

It is her father of whom she is thinking:

I would giue you some Violets, but they wither'd all when
my Father dyed: They say, he made a good end.

There is, however, another obsession in Ophelia's

brain—the obsession of love, and of love falsely betrayed. Her songs show this clearly enough:

*To morrow is S. Valentines day, all in the morning betine,
And I a Maid at your Window to be your Valentine.
Then vp he rose, & donned his clothes, & dupt the chamber
dore,*

Let in the Maid, that out a Maid, neuer departed more. . . .

Indeed la? without an oath Ile make an end on't.

By gis, and by S. Charity, Alacke, and fie for shame :

*Young men wil doo't, if they come too't, By Cocke, they are
too blame.*

Quoth she before you tumbled me, you promis'd me to Wid.

[He answers.]

*So would I ha done, by yonder Sunne, And thou hadst not
come to my bed.*

Her words trail off into meaningless grief, but there seems to lie in those words a deep truth. Part of her song corresponds exactly with what she had already told her father concerning Hamlet, and, when we put the rest of the story alongside of Hamlet's own phrases, is the truth that Shakespeare meant not plain?

Treating the play as a play, studying Shakespeare's clues and dismissing all sentimental colourings, we must, it seems, come to the one conclusion concerning the relations of Hamlet and Ophelia. The sight of his mother's hasty action, and the consciousness of a certain sensuality in his own nature, operate together to throw Hamlet off his balance. "Frailty, thy name is woman." The realisation that his adored idol, Ophelia, is just such another as his mother hurls him into a whirlpool of doubt and of melancholy bitterness; his own

horror, added to this, gives rise to that contrast in his mind between the world of dreams and the world of reality. He wishes that his too, too solid, or, as I prefer to read it, his too too soiled flesh would melt. His world of the intellect, his idealistic visions, are shattered.

This mood of despair, despair of himself and of others, thus engendered, so enwraps his whole being that he feels powerless of any action; his mind is a chaos and he knows not what to think or what to do. We are approaching nearer to the secret of his soul.

III

THE TRAGEDIE OF HAMLET

It is quite natural that the shocks to Hamlet's inner nature, which I endeavoured to trace in my last lecture, should tend to destroy his sanity. On this question much of later commentary has settled. The general tendency in modern times has been to deny anything approaching madness in Hamlet's character or actions. "If at any moment in the play," declares Professor Bradley, "the hero were truly mad, then *Hamlet* would not be a tragedy of the Shakespearian type." "The fact is," announces Stopford Brooke, "that Shakespeare never intended to represent Hamlet as mad or half mad or verging on madness. He expressly made him a feigner of madness." Here is left not the slightest avenue for even the enunciation of any temporary aberration in Hamlet's mind. When we consider the play in detail, however, or when we consider the attitude

of contemporaries towards it, we wonder whether truly this is the real explanation of Shakespeare's purpose. There is scene after scene where Hamlet *appears* to be mad. A spectator who came across the play for the first time would unhesitatingly write down Hamlet as a wise lunatic, a lunatic with method in his madness. Are we to suppose that Shakespeare in his tragedy provides us with wrong clues? Surely this would be carrying dramatic subtlety too far. As before, we must endeavour to follow Shakespeare's suggestions, step by step, allowing ourselves to be misled neither by popular views nor by the rigid application of theories regarding Shakespeare's conception of tragedy, which are, after all, to be built out of this as out of other dramas. Professor Bradley's assertion cited above seems to assume that there is some abstract "idea" of Shakespearian tragedy which exists independently of the plays whereas such an "idea" is obviously nothing but a subjective mental image in the mind of an individual critic, and, as such, cannot be used to test any of the dramas. ✓

The question here, be it noted, is hardly one between madness and sanity. No one could deny that Hamlet in many of his speeches, from the beginning of the play to the very end, utters thoughts which betray not the slightest taint of a diseased brain. These thoughts may not always be "normal"; certain readers may call them unhealthy in the sense that they display too much introspection and too much prying into those things which considered after in these ways do sometimes make us mad, but of actual lunacy there is none. On the

other hand, madness may not be permanent, and madness may be defined in many diverse manners and with countless shades of significance. Perhaps all will agree, however, with the definition of madness as that state in which a person loses, momentarily or permanently, control of himself, utters words and executes actions which spring not from his reason but from a part of his brain which has gained dominance over his other faculties. In other words, a marked loss of mental balance is a sign of madness. Taking this definition, let us turn to Hamlet's character and to the clues which Shakespeare has left us.

In the first place, we note that the word mad or madness dominates the play; but this, in itself, proves nothing since Hamlet deliberately feigned lunacy in several scenes, and succeeded in deceiving thereby some of his companions. What is more important is to note his own words when alone or when he was in a moment of extreme mental and emotional stress. As we have seen, there were many things which might well destroy Hamlet's balance—his disgust at the Queen, his disgust at Ophelia, his disgust at himself, the whole contrast between his world of idealism and the crude, crass reality of the castle at Elsinore. When he first appears before us he is perfectly sane. His words are melancholy bitter in the second scene of Act I, but there is here nothing except grief and disgust at his mother. When he walks the battlements, discoursing with his companions, he is absolutely normal, and, until the fulfilment of his inner prophecy, his address to the ghost is that of an ordinary reason-

able man. The ghost narrates in detail the circumstances of his father's murder, and Hamlet stands rapt and silent. Then the ghost, with the approach of the russet-mantled dawn, vanishes, leaving the Prince spellbound. When he can find words, a torrent of speech rushes from his lips. He is alone; the words are uttered only for himself, and because of that form one of the keynotes to the play.

Oh all you host of Heauen! Oh Earth: what els?
 And shall I couple Hell? Oh fie: hold my heart;
 And you my sinnewes, grow not instant Old;
 But beare me stiffely vp: Remember thee?
 I, thou poore Ghost, while memory holds a seate
 In this distracted Globe: Remember thee?
 Yea, from the Table of my Memory,
 Ile wipe away all triuiall fond Records,
 All sawes of Bookes, all formes, all presures past,
 That youth and obseruation coppied there;
 And thy Commandment all alone shall liue
 Within the Booke and Volume of my Braine,
 Vnmixt with baser matter; yes, yes, by Heauen:
 Oh most pernicious woman!
 Oh Villaine, Villaine, smiling damned Villaine!
 My Tables, my Tables; meet it is I set it downe,
 That one may smile, and smile and be a Villaine;
 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmarke;
 So Vncle there you are: now to my word;
 It is; Aduce, Aduce, Remember me: I haue sworn't.

His comrades cry from without, and he answers them,

Hillo, ho, ho, boy; come bird, come.

His "wild and whirling words" attract their attention, and Horatio's admonition seems for a moment

to sober him. He asks them to swear secrecy, but on the sound of the ghost's voice once more he falls back upon his wild utterances:

Ah ha boy, sayest thou so. Art thou there true-penny? Come one you here this fellow in the selleredge. . . . Well said old Mole, can'st worke i' th' ground so fast? A worthy Pioner.

Again a respite of calm and he ends on a note of melancholy and despair.

The cardinal point is not his words to his companions, but the words he uttered to himself before their appearance. "He takes out his tablets to write the observation down," says Stopford Brooke. "It seems an absurd action—but in reality it is a subconscious recurrence to a habit of his student life. At least, so I explain it." Is it not rather that Hamlet is here, because of the tremendous excitement, thrown for a moment off his balance, recalled by Horatio's words, and lapsed again into mental and emotional confusion? As such the scene displays itself upon the stage, even when the actor most strives to uphold the conception of Hamlet's essential sanity. Could Shakespeare have acted at cross-purposes with himself?

The next scene in which Hamlet is similarly displayed in a moment of extreme tension and stress is that of the play within the play after the success of the Mouse-Trap has been proved and Claudius has fled crying wildly for the lights. Hamlet remains on the stage with Horatio. What are his words? Not a swift turning to his friend for confirmation, but a wild and whirling cry:

Why, let the stricken Deere go weepe,
 The Hart vngalled play:
 For some must watch, while some must sleepe;
 So runnes the world away. . . .
 For thou dost know: Oh *Damon* deere,
 This Realme dismantled was of love himselfe,
 And now reignes heere.
 A verie, verie Paiocke.

It is only Horatio's eminently sane "You might have Rim'd" that recalls him to his senses. Again there seems a momentary aberration, the temporary lack of mental balance restored only by the intrusion of a word from his friend.

A scene not so fully stressed but having similar characteristics is that wherein Hamlet watches the funeral procession of Ophelia. He sees Laertes spring into the grave, and the sight appears to sting his soul to madness. With a cry of "This is I, Hamlet the Dane" he grapples with Ophelia's brother. "What wilt thou do for her?" he shouts,

Come, show me what thou'lt doe.
 Woo't weepe? Woo't fight? [Woo't fast?] Woo't teare
 thy selfe?
 Woo't drinke up *Esile*, eat a crocodile?
 Ile doo't. Dost thou come here to whine;
 To outface me with leaping in her Graue?
 Be buried quicke with her, and so will I.
 And if thou prate of Mountaines; let them throw
 Millions of Akers on vs; till our ground
 Sindging his pate against the burning zone,
 Make *Ossa* like a wart. Nay, and thoul't mouth,
 Ile rant as well as thou.

There is here no reason for any feigned madness;

he has not any Polonius to deceive in this scene; his words are his own, flowing from his distempered brain.

In addition to these scenes wherein Hamlet shows his marked lack of mental balance, there are some significant passages elsewhere, which seem to show his consciousness of his own state.

I am but mad North, North-West: when the Winde is Southerly, I know a Hawke from a Handsaw,

he confesses to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, after he had detected these two comrades of his as spies of the King. There was no necessity for that explanation, especially to two men such as they, had he known himself always feigning. This, it would seem, is a true diagnosis by himself of his own mental state.

They foole me to the top of my bent,

is a strange aside for a man eminently sane, conscious of his deception of others, as is likewise the speech to Guildenstern immediately preceding:

Why looke you now, how vnworthy a thing you make of me: you would play vpon me; you would seeme to know my stops: you would pluck out the heart of my Mysterie; you would sound mee from my lowest Note, to the top of my Compasse: and there is much Musicke, excellent Voice, in this little Organe, yet cannot you make it [speak. 'Sblood] do you thinke, that I am easier to be plaid on, then a Pipe? Call me what Instrument you will, though you can fret me, [yet] you cannot play vpon me.

Hamlet utters these words precisely because he is not sure of himself, because he feels that at moments

he does lose his sanity, because the others around him, being not so finely strung as he, fool him to the top of his bent. To me it seems that there can be no question but that Shakespeare intended Hamlet to be presented as inclined towards madness, and as losing control of himself at certain definite moments during the development of the play.

This genuine madness, lack of balance—call it what we will—is, however, obscured by a madness clearly feigned and easily to be distinguished from the other. The consciousness that he has so lost control of himself when he is called back to sanity by Horatio's insistence upon his wild and whirling words arouses in his ever fertile brain the idea of putting "an antic disposition on," and so of aiding in the concealment of his own deformity. This guise he continues for some time, with intermittent lapses when his mind is taken from his preconceived idea. If this explanation be accepted, it shows another instance in Hamlet of his too great introspection. His general faith in existence, his no doubt hitherto serene attitude towards life, has been destroyed and he looks into his own self to find what is wanting there. He finds in himself a certain weakness which he strives to cover over by a pretended madness; he finds, moreover, or thinks he finds, a sensuality which links him with the most bestial forms of nature and with the most bestial men and women; he turns from both with thoughts of suicide and is deterred only by his religion and his fear. It is from this point onwards that we may consider in greater detail the reasons that

Hamlet had for his delay. These reasons are based on his own nature. He is confronted with a tremendous problem and knows not how to answer it aright. For an analysis of his emotions, naturally his own soliloquies form surest evidence.

There is, first of all, a quite evident natural repulsion to the task assigned to him. He is incapable of planning out and carrying to completion in a cold-blooded manner any scheme of revenge. In all his actions he shows himself as a man of intense energy, an energy, however, which results not from premeditated idea but from sudden impulse. When he cries to the ghost that he will sweep to his revenge, he means it, and could then and there have plunged his sword in Claudius' heart had the latter been present. He deals thus summarily with Polonius and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. His physical courage during these moments of excitement has already been commented upon, and his words to Horatio at the end prove his power of will on such occasions:

As th'art a man giue me the Cup.
Let go, by Heauen, Ile haue't.

These are not the words of a man lacking a certain wilful assurance. Nor does he feel regret at deeds of violence committed by himself. His only words over the dead Polonius signify his sorrow that it was not Claudius he had slain:

Thou wretched, rash, intruding foole farewell,
I tooke thee for thy Better.

He could well have wished to rid himself thus easily

of his task. His remarks on the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are equally callous:

Why man, they did make loue to this employment
They are not neere my Conscience.

What his whole being shrinks from is a cold-blooded, premeditated murder, or from plunging his steel knowingly into the flesh of his enemy. He will not, however, confess this honestly to himself, and hints at it only once or twice in the play. For losing his opportunity of killing Claudius at prayer he finds for himself a specious excuse and passes away in horror. This cowardice in his nature he feels most strongly after he has listened to the player-King. "Am I a Coward?" he asks:

Who calles me Villaine? breakes my pate a-crosse?
Pluckes off my Beard, and blowes it in my face?
Tweakes me by th' Nose? giues me the Lye i' the Throate,
As deepe as to the Lungs? Who does me this?
Ha? ['Swounds] I should take it: for it cannot be,
But I am Pigeon-Liuer'd, and lacke Gall
To make Oppression bitter, or ere this,
I should haue fatted all the Region Kites
With this Slaue's Offal.

Later in the play, when the plot is nearing its catastrophe, the same thought recurs to him.

Now, whether it be
Bestiall obliuion, or some crauen scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th' euent,

he cannot tell, but the problem is in his mind. This cowardice may be due in part to his habit of meditation.

Thus Conscience does make Cowards of vs all,

he cries, realising that his own thoughts deter him from executing his desires. To conceal even from himself the presence of this "craven scruple" he falls back on what are after all but specious arguments. At one moment he seems to doubt whether he has the right to kill Claudius, at another manufactures arguments against his father's spirit. This part of Hamlet's character requires especially careful consideration, for, as I shall endeavour to show later, Shakespeare appears to have intended him to be deeply influenced by Horatio's rationalism and calm. Unquestionably Horatio acts as a deterrent upon Hamlet, but Hamlet on his part shows that something in his mind craved for that deterrent. The result is that two forces are working within him, one of which would drive him forward, and the other of which would seek for arguments against any premeditated action. The play within the play provides an excellent illustration of this. The tragedy which Hamlet causes the comedians to perform has its definite purpose (its aim is to convince Horatio) but Hamlet also uses this play as an excuse to himself for his own delay, and in so far his thoughts lack sincerity. In one of his main soliloquies he pretends that it is merely a test to convince himself.

The Spirit that I haue seene
 May be the Diuell, and the Diuel hath power
 T'assume a pleasing shape, yea and perhaps
 Out of my Weaknesse, and my Melancholly,
 As he is very potent with such Spirits,
 Abuses me to damne me. Ile haue grounds
 More Relatiue then this: The Play's the thing,
 Wherein Ile catch the Conscience of the King.

These words ring false, because we feel that Hamlet, in his soul, knew the spirit to be that of his father, and never doubted that the task assigned to him was a true and necessary one. And yet, although he says

If he but blench,
I know my course,

after the King has departed in disorder, Hamlet is as undecided as he was before. The ghost reappears to remind him of his "almost blunted purpose" and he himself refers in sickness of heart to his "dull revenge." In every way he can he lashes his soul to action, but in vain. He sees the tears of the player-King, and his mind is full of rage at himself:

Oh, what a Rogue and Pesant slaue am I!
Is it not monstrous that this Player heere,
But in a Fixion, in a dreame of Passion,
Could force his soule so to his whole conceit,
That from her working, all his visage wan'd;
Teares in his eyes, distraction in's Aspect,
A broken voyce, and his whole Function suiting
With Formes, to his Conceit? And all for nothing?
For *Hecuba*?

What's *Hecuba* to him, or he to *Hecuba*,
That he should weepe for her? What would he doe,
Had he the Motiue and the Cue for passion
That I haue?

So, too, at a later period, he feels the same disgust at himself:

How all occasions doe informe against me,
And spur my dull reuenge. . . .

Examples grosse as earth exhort me,
Witnes this Army of such masse and charge,

Led by a delicate and tender Prince,
 Whose spirit with diuine ambition pufte,
 Makes mouthes at the invisible euent,
 Exposing what is mortall, and vnſure,
 To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
 Euen for an Egge-shell. . . .

How ſtand I then

That haue a father kild, a mother ſtained,
 Excytements of my reaſon, and my blood,
 And let all ſleepe, while to my ſhame I ſee
 The imminent death of twenty thouſand men,
 That for a fantaſie and tricke of fame
 Goe to their graues like beds, fight for a plot
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cauſe,
 Which is not tombe enough and continent
 To hide the ſlaine, ō from this time forth,
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth.

Thus was he ever ſtriving to arouſe the ſleeping nature in himſelf and ſtriving to find excuſes for the "craven ſcruple," for the ſhrinking from this deed of premeditated murder.

Herein, however, lay not Hamlet's only cauſe of delay. We have already noted his inſiſtence on the fact that "conſcience does make cowards of us all," and it was conſcience in this ſenſe—meditation, reflection—which ſerved to hinder his ſweeping to his revenge. The tendency towards reflection was, of courſe, highly natural to one who was ſo intellectual as Hamlet, and ſo keenly ſtrung. In ſpite of a freſh heartineſs which manifeſts itſelf when he greets his old comrades, Horatio, Roſencrantz, and Guildenſtern, and in ſpite of his general robuſt phyſique, he is given to clothing everything with the veſture of thought and to ſpending his time

with words rather than with actions. This quality in himself he fully realises.

And thus the Natiue hew of Resolution
Is sicklied o're, with the pale cast of Thought,
And enterprizes of great pith and moment,
With this regard their Currants turne away,
And loose the name of Action—

so he explains it to himself when he is in the mid-way of his tragic career, and even earlier than this he had dwelt on the thought of how his whole life was being wasted in mere talk:

Who? what an Asse am I? I sure, this is most braue,
That I, the Sonne of [a dear father] murdered,
Prompted to my Reuenge by Heauen, and Hell,
Must like a Whore vnpacke my heart with words,
And fall a-Cursing, like a very Drab,
A Scullion?

His whole being, his real being, was one of thought, so that he came to persuade himself that "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," and felt that he "could be bounded in a nutshell and count" himself "a King of infinite space; were it not that" he had "bad dreams." It is this quality of meditation that makes him harp continually on suicide, and explains his peculiar reflections over the skull of poor Yorick.

In so far the views of the Hegel-Coleridge school are justified. *Hamlet* is a tragedy of reflection; but this is only one part of an infinitely greater truth. While reflection predominates in Hamlet's nature, it is not reflection alone which hinders him from killing the King. Indeed, we might feel that this

outpouring of words is not so much the cause of his delay as the result consequent upon that delay.

There are also to be considered a few suggestions left by Shakespeare which, so far as I know, have never been commented upon. In speaking to Ophelia in iii. 1, Hamlet declares that he is "very proud, revengeful, ambitious." The words might be allowed to pass as a chance phrase were it not that the "pride" is emphasised again by the King, and that the ambitious qualities are suggested in at least one later scene. "He that hath . . . popp'd in between the election and my hopes," Hamlet describes Claudius to Horatio. Such is not the phrase we might have expected at such a moment from the hero of the tragedy, and may have bearing on a piece of dialogue in an earlier act:

Ham. Sir I lacke Aduancement.

Rosin. How can that be, when you haue the voyce of the King himselfe, for your Succession in Denmarke?

Ham. I, but while the grasse growes, the Prouerbe is something musty.

May there not be here one of Shakespeare's clues? Is it not that Hamlet, again with his deep introspection, is not quite sure of his own motives? Does he not think that if he murders his uncle, it may be only for his own ends? Shakespeare is not likely to have emphasised the quality thrice in so marked a manner without having had therefor some definite purpose. Here probably we see one of the chief causes of Hamlet's delay, of his half-wondering whether the ghost might not be an hallucination or a spirit called forth by the devil to lure him to

damnation, above all, of part at least of his disgust at himself and at man's petty ways.

In close connection with this aspect of Hamlet's character goes another which is merely hinted at in various parts of the play. Obviously, the only man in whom Hamlet trusts is Horatio; he conceals his secret from Marcellus and the rest, but to Horatio he unburdens his heart. This reliance of the storm-tossed hero on him who was more of an antique Roman than a Dane is emphasised from the first scene of their reunion to the last, when the latter is bidden to absent himself from felicity awhile to tell Hamlet's story. Beyond this general reliance, moreover, Shakespeare seems to hint at something else; the influence of Horatio upon Hamlet would seem to go beyond mere comradeship. More than ordinary significance lies in that long speech with which Hamlet, in the midst of the drama, addresses his friend:

Nay do not thinke I flatter:

For what aduancement may I hope from thee,
That no Reuennew hast, but thy good spirits
To feed & cloath thee. Why should the poor be flatter'd?
No, let the Candied tongue [lick] absurd pompe,
And crooke the pregnant Hindges of the Knee,
Where thrift may follow faining? Dost thou hear,
Since my deere Soule was mistris of my choyse,
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath seal'd thee for her selfe. For thou hast bene
As one in suffering all, that suffers nothing.
A man that Fortunes buffets, and Rewards
Hath 'tane with equall Thankes. And blest are those,
Whose Blood and Iudgement are so well co-mingled,
That they are not a Pipe for Fortunes finger,

To sound what stop she please. Give me that man,
 That is not Passions Slaue, and I will weare him
 In my hearts Core: I, in my Heart of heart,
 As I do thee. Something too much of this.
 There is a Play to night before the King,
 One Scène of it comes neere the Circumstance
Which I have told thee, of my Fathers death.
 I prythee, when thou see'st that Acte a-foot,
 Euen with the verie Comment of my¹ Soule
 Obserue mine Vnkle: If his occulted guilt,
 Do not it selfe vnkennell in one speech,
It is a damned Ghost that we haue seene,
 And my Imaginations are as foule
 As Vulcans Stythie. Giue him needful note,
 For I mine eyes will riuet to his Face:
*And after we will both our iudgements ioyn*e,
To censure of his seeming.

We have seen nothing of Horatio since the end of the first act. Yet here in Hamlet's speech he seems to see nothing peculiar; his answer is straightforward as one who is in the secret:

Well my Lord.

If he steale ought the whil'st this Play is Playing,
 And scape detecting, I will pay the Theft.

From the passage, then, we are allowed—nay, are bound—to make two deductions: (1) that Hamlet has informed Horatio of all that passed between the

¹ *My* and *mine* are the readings of the quartos and the folios respectively. Most modern editors read *thy*. But, if we take this view of Horatio's position in the play, then *my* has a direct significance. The "comment," that is to say the "interpretation" or "suspicion" of Hamlet, is that which Horatio must endeavour to appreciate.

ghost and himself, and (2) that Horatio, with his sane mind and strong will-power, had proved somewhat unsympathetic. Hamlet's words are in the nature of an appeal, and his reference to the ghost and to his own imaginings sound as if they were the echoes of conversations held in the interim between Horatio and himself.

After this Horatio again disappears. Save for a momentary conversation with the Queen we are not introduced to him again until he is handed Hamlet's letter. It is noticeable that it is to him that Hamlet writes, and that in his letter are the same notes which seem to point to former conversations. In v, 1 the two make their appearance upon the stage. Hamlet is loquacious and excited, philosophising on graves and skulls, whereas Horatio answers him monosyllabically, or in short phrases, a device which, as we have seen, Shakespeare utilises when he wishes to show his character in reflection. "It might, my Lord . . . I, my Lord . . . Not a jot more, my Lord . . . I, my Lord, and of Calue skinn'es too"—beyond that he does not rise. Follow Hamlet's words with the grave-digger, but when the prince turns to him again, Horatio is no less taciturn: "What's that, my Lord. . . . E'ene so. . . . E'ene so, my Lord. . . . 'Twere to consider [too] curiously to consider so." During the wild scene of Ophelia's burial, his only remark is "Good my Lord, be quiet." It is a truth easily demonstrable that often Shakespeare's purpose is less to be discerned in the words of his characters than in the attitude displayed by these characters throughout a particular scene. Horatio's behaviour here seems

exactly parallel with Banquo's behaviour in the scene when Duncan is discovered murdered. Like Banquo, he is evidently thoughtful and watchful; he is anxiously alarmed at the wild words of his friend, and not certain yet of his mental sanity. With his frank reasonableness, and at the same time with his boundless devotion to the prince, he stands silent at his side as if to guard him.

The following scene shows the pair once more together, and Hamlet, it would seem, adopts his tone of appeal. He tells in detail of the adventure on shipboard. Horatio's "Is't possible?" seems slightly incredulous, and Hamlet's reply full of anxiety to convince his friend:

Here's the Commission, read it at more leysure:
But wilt thou heare me how I did proceed?

Again, Horatio's replies are watchful and full of sober eagerness to learn whether Hamlet's words are those of truth. "I, good my Lord" he says, and then "How was this seal'd?" as if he had at last caught Hamlet tripping. The latter answers sincerely and directly, and Horatio is at length convinced. "So *Guildesterne* and *Rosinrance*, go too't" shows his acceptance of Hamlet's story, and then, with a cry—"Why, what a King is this!"—he turns to the thought of Claudius. Thereupon Hamlet, as if now that his tale has been accepted, he sought for full confirmation, urges his final plea:

Does it not, thinkst thee, stand me now vpon
He that hath kil'd my King, and whor'd my Mother,
Popt in betweene th' election and my hopes,
Throwne out his Angle for my proper life,

And with such coozenage; is't not perfect conscience,
To quit him with this arme? And is't not to be damn'd
To let this Canker of our nature come
In further euill.

Is it not as plain as if Shakespeare had made Hamlet say, "Do you not agree with me *now*?"? Horatio, however, avoids the issue, and his mind, in constant watchfulness over his prince, reverts to what might ensue from Hamlet's sudden action on the ship:

It must be shortly knowne to him from England
What is the issue of the businesse there.

Hamlet dismisses his fear:

It will be short,
The *interim's* mine, and a mans life's no more
Then to say one: but I am very sorry good *Horatio*,
That to *Laertes* I forget my selfe;
For by the image of my Cause, I see
The Portraiture of his; Ile court his fauours:
But sure the brauery of his griefe did put me
Into a Towring passion.

Is it not again as if, between the previous scene and this, Horatio had been chiding him for his folly, and emphasising his initial remark—"Good my Lord, be quiet?"

The entry of Osric breaks their discourse—it is noticeable that it is Horatio who cautions "Peace" to Hamlet—and beyond a couple of good-humoured gibes at the "lapwing" courtier, he does not speak again till the latter has departed. Then it is again to utter a word of warning: "You will lose this wager, my Lord." Hamlet replies, and then, when

he is referring to his own despair, Horatio interrupts him with a "Nay, good my Lord," itself interrupted by Hamlet. For some reason, no doubt fearing Hamlet's state of hysteria, Horatio wishes to postpone the engagement:

If your minde dislike any thing, obey [it]. I will forestall their repaire hither, and say you are not fit,

but Hamlet will not hear of it. Probably his pride and ambition stirs him on, in spite of his new-found mood of *laissez-faire*.

Thereafter Horatio can do nothing. The die is cast and fate performs the rest. At the end, however, he rises once more in importance and seems to dominate the concluding lines of the play. He desires to take the poison, but Hamlet prevents him, and he is left to tell the tragic story. He becomes, on Hamlet's death, the protagonist of a moment:

What is it ye would see;

If ought of woe, or wonder, cease your search;

and again:

Not from his mouth,

Had it th' abilitie of life to thanke you:

He neuer gave commandment for their death.

But since so iumpe vpon this bloodie question,

You from the Polake warres, and you from England

Are heere arriued. Give order that these bodies

High on a stage be placed to the view,

And let me speake to th' yet vnknowing world

How these things came about. So shall you heare

Of carnall, bloudie, and vnnaturall acts,

Of accidentall iudgements, casuall slaughters

Of death's put on by cunning, and forc'd cause,

And in the vpshot, purposes mistooke,
 Falne on the Inuentors heads. All this can I
 Truly deliver. . . .
 Of that I shall haue alwayes cause to speake,
 And from his mouth
 Whose voyce will draw on more:
 But let this same be presently perform'd,
Euen whiles mens mindes are wilde,
 Lest more mischance on plots and errors happen.

I have searched in vain for an adequate commentary upon these last lines. They must mean something, and yet at first sight they seem meaningless. If, however, we take this view that Horatio has come to realise that his own too great reasonableness has been responsible for much of the disaster, then the plea for passionate action and the reference to "accidentall iudgements" are both explained. It is, again, as if Shakespeare were emphasising the truth he wishes to reveal.

Behind Hamlet throughout the play stands Horatio, and Shakespeare's clues seem to point to a direct influence on the prince exercised by his friend. Horatio is far more than a mere *confidant*. The tragedy of *Hamlet* rests on him as well as on the frenzied nature of his prince and comrade.

There is, finally, to be considered one other point in connection with Hamlet's character and delay—his love for Ophelia. Already part of this has been dealt with. Hamlet loved Ophelia, and this partly created in him the mood of despair and melancholy, partly aided in retarding his actions. It is not that his love in any way stands opposed to his revenge, but that it completely upsets his already unbalanced

emotions. Ophelia has shown to him, in his morbid state, the universal rottenness of the world, and he cannot steel his mind to any determined action. It is noticeable that it is Ophelia's death which creates in him a change of temper revealed in the last act. After his whirling words to Laertes and his struggle with him in the grave we hear the first utterance of this new spirit:

Heare you Sir:

What is the reason that you vse me thus?

I lou'd her euer; *but it is no matter* :

Let *Hercules* himselve doe what he may,

The Cat will Mew, and Dogge will haue his day.

For a moment, in retelling his adventures to Horatio, he regains his old enthusiasm, chiefly in a desire to convince his friend that after all he was right, but, that over, he relapses into his new pessimistic carelessness:

I am constant to my purposes, they followe the Kings pleasure, if his fitnes speakes, mine is ready: now or when-soever, provided I be so able as now. . . .

But thou wouldest not thinke how [ill all's] heere about my heart: *but it is no matter*. . . .

Not a whit; we defie Augury; there's a speciall Prouidence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come: if it bee not to come, it will bee now: if it be not now, yet it will come.

That Ophelia's death was responsible for this change seems an inevitable conclusion. She dies, and after that nothing seems to matter; it is Providence that decides our ends. So closes *Hamlet*, on a note of calm and of melancholy peace. The storms

of his spirit have shattered his world and naught remains. Death comes to him, unsought yet unopposed, a glad end to restless travail.

Hamlet, then, appears to me to be a study in indecision, an indecision due to several great causes: (1) To the too great idealism of the hero; (2) to too great introspection and brooding over his own character; (3) to the reliance of Hamlet on the eminently sane, faithful, and sincere Horatio; (4) to his love of Ophelia; (5) to a certain moral cowardice in his nature; and (6) to an ambitious spirit, the sincerity of which he feared. While I should be the last to assert that the mechanical tabulating of "qualities" could ever explain fully the complex nature of a Shakespearian hero, I do believe that the clues left by Shakespeare point to those features as the determining elements in Hamlet's character, and as the key to the tragedy, and that many of these clues are more appreciable emotionally in the theatre than intellectually in the study.

IV

THE TRAGEDIE OF OTHELLO, THE MOORE OF VENICE

IN passing from *Hamlet* to *Othello*, we pass from what was a drama quite definitely written for the public stage, with full attention given to popular appeal, to a carefully wrought play, of which the unique structure, the peculiar theme and the intricacies of psychological delineation indicate that it

was designed primarily to satisfy the dramatist himself. The plot of the play, as is well known, Shakespeare took bodily from an Italian *novella*, a fairly successfully told tale of intrigue and adventure, although lacking in true characterisation. Out of this capable but somewhat mediocre study Shakespeare wrought one of his most outstanding tragedies; and the question may at once be asked: What exactly was it that he saw and was charmed by in the Cinthio tale? *Othello* is essentially a tragedy of intrigue, but it cannot have been the intrigue alone which seized upon the dramatist's fancy. In styling the play a tragedy of intrigue, we mean that the climax and catastrophe are the result, not merely of the characteristic actions of the hero, but of the machinations of a figure whose motives are concealed from the hero. All the genuine action in *Hamlet* springs from the nature of the prince. Lear, after the first few scenes, is never in doubt concerning the true aims of Regan and of Goneril. Macbeth plots, but he himself is the protagonist. *Othello* is peculiar in that, while the tragedy would not have been possible had it not been for the peculiar characteristics of the chief *dramatis personæ*, the hero is led to a deed of crime by another character whom he completely misunderstands and misjudges. It must be perfectly obvious that such a theme is not well suited to tragedy. Intrigue is one of the most natural themes for comedy, where the tangle of misunderstandings and petty devices is in the end straightened out in a happy and joyous manner; but in serious drama the sense of the underhand and the mean and the intriguing gives us to feel that a tragic

conclusion is too lamentable. As a rule, we can watch deceit and villainy lurking under a fair exterior only when we have the comfortable feeling that all will come right in the end.

This first point noted in *Othello* leads to another. *Othello* is unique among Shakespeare's dramas in having two main centres of interest. Iago it is who drives the plot forward. He comes upon the stage as much as Othello, and the play begins and ends with him. This peculiarity, which marks a distinct departure from Shakespeare's normal straining after unity of effect, was, we can in no wise doubt, conscious and deliberate.

Finally, there is the construction of the tragedy as a whole. The battlement scene in *Hamlet*, the gabbling witches in *Macbeth*, and Lear's inconsequent and fatal action, all prepare us at once for the later developments of the tragic themes. In *Othello*, for nearly three acts, we are introduced to hardly anything which promises a necessarily tragic conclusion. It is only in the later scenes that the climax is found, and from there on we are rushed forward with increasing swiftness to the torment of the close. Once more, we find a distinct departure from Shakespeare's normal procedure, made, no doubt, partly as an experiment, partly because of the difficulties which he saw before him in the plot he had adopted.

Of these difficulties in his path Shakespeare must have been well aware. With the intrigue element he must have seen that he would have to provide a more than common air of inevitability to the whole drama. The plot once accepted, its treatment

demanding a unique dramatic construction, a departure from his usual method of presenting a hero in tragic isolation and, above all, a specially careful motivating of the actions in the play. This, of course, leads us to the further and ultimate question, why Shakespeare, if he saw all those difficulties, chose the theme of *Othello* at all. As we have seen, a close examination of Shakespeare's sources seems to militate against the popular idea that he chose subjects here and there as an untutored fancy dictated. That he normally chose themes which he considered would be popular can hardly be denied; but that he was careless in his choice is another matter. The care which he devoted to *Othello* seems to show that the selection of Cinthio's story was a deliberate one, that Shakespeare had gone out of his way to take a theme which on the surface seemed to possess no possibilities for the stage, and, by giving it an air of inevitability, to take our reasons and our emotions by storm.

Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* was, apparently, much in Shakespeare's mind in the early years of the seventeenth century. From it he borrowed, not only the tale of "Il Moro di Venezia," but the theme of *Measure for Measure*. The former story is easily told. There is in Venice a Moor of valorous character who is given high command in the state. He falls in love with, and marries, a Venetian lady, Disdemona, in spite of parental opposition. Othello is sent to Cyprus, and, after some doubt, takes his wife with him. Meanwhile, a very handsome *alfiero*, or Ancient, villainous but much trusted by Othello, falls in love with Disdemona; he is

rejected, and, seeing that the lady is courteous to a certain Captain, concludes that there is a guilty liaison in that quarter. He determines to accuse the Captain to the Moor, but, knowing how dearly the former is held by Otello, he waits for a fitting opportunity to practise his cheat. Shortly after the Captain is degraded in rank for having attacked a soldier, and Disdemona tries to make peace between him and her husband. This gives the villain his chance: subtly phrased words penetrate so deeply into the mind of the Moor that, when Disdemona pleads with him again, he flies into a passion. The Ancient presses home his cheat, and, some proof being demanded, he plans a new devilry. Using as a tool his three-year-old child, he steals a handkerchief which had been given to Disdemona by her husband. This he puts into the hands of the Captain, who, knowing it to be Disdemona's, goes with it to her house. There Otello catches sight of him, and later, with the Moor as a concealed auditor, the Ancient chats with him. Otello is now convinced and plans to murder Disdemona, who, now in anxious terror, confides in the Ancient's wife, a woman who lives in deadly fear of her husband. The Ancient is employed to execute the fell revenge. He deceitfully wounds and then comforts the Captain; and ultimately smothers Disdemona, pulling down a ceiling to conceal the crime.

As is evident, Shakespeare has followed his original closely, even down to particular situations and particular words; but he has made several salient alterations which deserve our close attention. The most important, perhaps, is the general change in

the figure of Iago. Cinthio's villain is a young and handsome ancient who enters into his intrigue only for the love he bears towards the Moor's wife. Clearly this does not give motive enough for his actions. We feel that his most reasonable course would have been to stab the Moor and obtain the affections of Desdemona, by force if necessary. This is the first difficulty which Shakespeare must have perceived. The child of the Ancient is, of course, excluded as a wholly unnecessary figure: three-year-old child-actors on the Elizabethan stage were no doubt difficult to come by. This silent omission need not detain us. In the character of Emilia, on the other hand, we find a complete transformation. Again Shakespeare must have been aware that the credulity of his audience would be unduly strained if the Ancient's wife were shown as intimate with Iago's machinations and still as concealing them. Two thorough villains in one drama were hardly possible, and Cinthio's explanation that the Ancient's wife lived in fear of her husband would not be a sufficient explanation for the theatre. Over and above this, Shakespeare had the problem of convincing us of the probability of certain episodes run over rapidly in the *novella*. (1) He had to make Iago's villainy possible; the Ancient could not be presented as a mere lustful soldier, yet he could not be purely a stage villain. To create a genuine convincing psychological study out of an amorous and evil puppet was the dramatist's great task. (2) He had to provide more reason than is suggested by Cinthio for Othello's unthinking acceptance of the plot. That is to say, he had to make such a psycho-

logical study of Othello as to make his belief in Iago natural and probable. (3) Shakespeare must have seen, too, one very palpable weakness in Cinthio's plot—the failure of Disdemona to pierce Iago's evil practice with a word of denial. Accordingly he had to give her such characteristics that this failure should not be noticed.

Apart from these simpler problems of characterisation, which made the dramatic essay on Cinthio's theme a much more difficult and dangerous attempt than had been tried in *Hamlet*, there remained the problem of securing unity of effect. Shakespeare must have realised that a simple dramatisation of Cinthio's story would not make a high tragedy. A mere villain, a mere gullible husband, a mere faithful wife would have made a satisfactory drama of the *Arden of Feversham* type, but they would not have made a tragedy of Shakespearian conception. There is not one of his other tragedies wherein we do not feel the ever-present sense of fate, the sense of divine irony, the mockery of the gods and the weeping of innumerable unseen voices. It would certainly have been peculiar if *Othello* had lacked this spirit, nor is it lacking. Shakespeare, dealing with a theme of more domestic type than he had dealt with in any of his other plays, could not employ the devices utilised by him elsewhere. A ghost in any shape would at once have destroyed the special tone of this tragedy; but use has been made of subtler motives and subtler suggestions. Over the whole drama is cast a note of tragic irony which at once hints to us of forces beyond our ken, and, more important still, there is a common mood which enwraps

all the figures in its control, providing a unity of effect and the suggestion of a fatal power over and beyond the actual characters. This common mood is not, as so many have asserted, mere jealousy. Throughout the play run the keynotes of deception and self-deception, the jealousy being only the more obvious result and effect of those forces which move deeply below the whole tragic action.

From a consideration of *Othello* as a play of deception and of self-deception, then, and only as such, does a correct estimation of Shakespeare's purpose seem to me possible. The three main difficulties in Cinthio's plot—the motivating of Iago's actions, the presentation of Othello's acceptance of Iago's machinations as natural, and the providing of Desdemona with such qualities that her failure to pierce Iago's schemes should not be noticed—these are all to be explained by this general mood or theme. It is with Desdemona we may commence.

There is no question here about Shakespeare's prime conception of Desdemona's character. She is presented as a beautiful Venetian maiden, pure and innocent; one who, when married, cannot even conceive of the possibility of loving another man, one who cannot fathom or realise the faintest import of Othello's insinuations. From the point of view of chastity and faithfulness she is a perfect creature. But this is by no means the whole of her story. Those who praise Desdemona and find in her naught but unblemished truth, fail entirely to grasp the purpose of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Desdemona is not a great tragic character, yet Shakespeare has subtly

delineated her nature so as to make her a perfect tool for Iago and a perfect foil for Othello. In the first place, she obviously lacks intellect and self-respect. She is no Cordelia; never does she stand forward as a creature of independent spirit and determination. Completely under the domination of her lord, her whole mind is swayed by his. Not only does she show no indignation at his wild insinuations and direct accusations, but she allows herself to be treated by him as a mere slave. In the presence of a Venetian courtier the Moor strikes her, and her only words are:

I haue not deseru'd this.

Othello tirades against her, and she moves away:

I will not stay to offend you,

is the only phrase that rises on her lips. Lodovico wishes her to be called back, and on Othello's cry of "Mistress!" she promptly answers "My lord?" and turns. On his command to depart she obediently moves away. These qualities of lack of intellect and of self-respect detract seriously from our sympathy, but they were rendered necessary by the exigencies of the story. To this Desdemona adds a lack of courage. She can act under the domination of her husband, but she cannot stand out boldly for herself. Had she had courage, intellect, and self-respect, even if she had had any one of these, the tragic issue of Iago's machinations would have been impossible.

These, however, are not the main things in her character; she represents in herself, as do the other

main characters, the all-fatal qualities of deception and of self-deception. It is on these Shakespeare has concentrated and it is these which it behoves us most carefully to analyse. It is noticeable that she is shown to us first in the play as deceiving her father. For some considerable time Desdemona must have been encouraging Othello in his love. His account of this we have no reason to disbelieve:

My Storie being done,

She gaue me for my paines a world of kisses:
 She swore in faith 'twas strange: 'twas passing strange,
 'Twas pittifull: 'twas wondrous pittifull.
 She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
 That Heauen had made her such a man. She thank'd me,
 And bad me, if I had a Friend that lou'd her,
 I should but teach him how to tell my Story,
 And that would wooe her. Upon this hint I spake.

Yet all this Desdemona had kept carefully concealed from her father, so that he could not conceive but that Othello had used potions to win her affections:

A Maiden, neuer bold:

Of Spirit so still, and quiet, that her Motion
 Blush'd at her selfe, and she, in spite of Nature,
 Of Yeares, of Country, Credite, euery thing
 To fall in Loue, with what she fear'd to looke on.

Already Shakespeare has shown to us a flaw in her character, and hints to us, in unmistakable words, that, when the time comes, she will undoubtedly fail. There is nothing of this in the tale of Cinthio. It is Shakespeare's art which has revealed to us with delicate touch wherein lay Desdemona's fatal human weakness. She would never lie for purely evil ends,

but, when we add this tendency of her nature to her lack of intellect and courage, we realise that she will probably tell a lie in order to get herself out of any little scrape. The lie will be natural, and its consequences will not come within her limited perception. Indeed, on this Shakespeare lays emphasis, as he was often wont to do. Brabantio's last words to Othello are a warning on this theme:

Looke to her (Moore) if thou hast eies to see:
She ha's deceiu'd her Father, and may thee.

Not in Brabantio's sense, but more fatally, was she to deceive her husband.

The way is thus excellently prepared for the climax-scene. Desdemona has lost her handkerchief and the Moor questions her concerning it. She has not intellect to see that truth is her only hope of salvation; her courage fails her when she has no one to stand by her side. On Othello's demanding the handkerchief she gives him another. He requests the first. "I haue it not about me," is her answer, and her later words tremblingly corroborate her implied lie. "No, indeed, my Lord. . . . Is't possible? . . . Indeed? Is't true? . . . Then would to Heauen, that I had neuer seene't? . . . Why do you speake so startingly and rash? . . . Bless vs! . . . It is not lost: but what and if it were? . . . I say, it is not lost." Again, her intellect failing her, she tries to turn Othello's mind to Cassio, only succeeding in fanning his preconceived suspicion to a flame of jealousy.

Shakespeare, apparently, felt that even these palpable clues might be overlooked—a not un-

justified fear—for this double deception on Desdemona's part is paralleled by a third. She is introduced to us as practising deceit: she ends her life on a lie. Othello has smothered her, and, when help arrives, she can summon only sufficient breath to murmur:

No body: I my selfe.

It is a pitiful lie; but all our pity for her should not blind us to the fact that this is entirely characteristic of her—her lack of self-respect, her tendency towards concealing of truth by prevarication. In this way she is responsible for her own doom.

Conscious deception, however, does not wholly explain her position in the drama; like the other characters, she deceives herself. Where is Desdemona if not in a world of romance, of idealism? There she dwells, deceiving herself even when she encounters the fierce torrent of Othello's jealousy. Just as Hamlet wove for himself a sphere of philosophical idealism, so Desdemona created for herself a realm of romance. When reality rudely burst into Hamlet's world of dreams, his intellect turned to abstruse meditation and reflection on the evils of life; but the rough hand of reality leaves Desdemona, because she is unintellectual, bewildered, and at a loss. The first touch of reality comes to her after Othello's outburst of anger in Act IV. In his presence she summons up just sufficient strength to answer his tirades feebly with single phrases. "I hope my Noble Lord esteemes me honest. . . . Alas, what ignorant sin haue I committed? . . . By Heauen, you do me wrong . . . Oh Heauen

forgiue vs!" Only once does she force herself to give him any sort of reasoned defence:

No, as I am a Christian.
If to preserue this vessell for my Lord,
From any other foule vnlawful touch
Be not to be a Strumpet, I am none.

This, however, shows but a momentary flash of spirit. In face of the reality, his anger, she is completely dazed. "Faith, halfe a sleepe" she answers Emilia when the latter asks her how she does. Her speeches are short and broken: her mind is confused:

With who? . . .
Who is thy Lord? . . .
I haue none: do not talke to me, *Emilia*,
I cannot weepe: nor answeres haue I none,
But what should go by water. Prythee to night,
Lay on my bed my wedding sheetes, remember,
And call thy husband hither. . . .
'Tis meete I should be vs'd so: very meete.
How haue I bin behau'd, that he might sticke
The small'st opinion on my least misvse.

Even this does not wholly awaken her, although it arouses her wonder and undoubtedly startles her idealism. In the last act, accordingly, we find her questioning Emilia about sin and still refusing to believe in it. She turns to the world of romance again.

My Mother had a Maid call'd *Barbarie*,
She was in loue: and he she lou'd prou'd mad,
And did forsake her. She had a Song of Willough,
An old thing 'twas: but it express'd her Fortune,
And she dy'd singing it: That Song to night,

Will not go from my mind: I haue much to do,
 But to go hang my head all at one side
 And sing it like poore *Barbarie*. . .

Then her mind reverts to reality:

Dos't thou in conscience thinke (tell me, *Æmilia*)
 That there be women do abuse their husbands
 In such grosse kinde? . . .
 Would'st thou do such a deed for all the world? . . .
 Would'st thou do such a deed for all the world? . . .
 Introth, I thinke thou would'st not. . . .
 Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong
 For the whole world. . . .
I do not thinke there is any such woman.

That is Shakespeare's final word on her character. In *Hamlet* he had presented the effects of a shock upon an intellectual nature, in Desdemona he shows the results of a similar shock upon a nature essentially unintellectual. It was as if he were trying the variations of the theme, eternal as the hills, of idealism opposed to reality.

It is evident that this conception of Desdemona's character made possible the success of Iago's evil practice. A Cordelia in Desdemona's place would not have deceived her father, would boldly have confessed the loss of the handkerchief, would, in the end, have had no opportunity for indulging in Desdemona's last pitiful lie. The preparing of a foundation for the success of Iago's machinations, however, was Shakespeare's least task; and we must assume that the dramatist himself realised the greater difficulties before him. The peculiar structure of *Othello*, already noted, depends largely on

this realisation; space had to be given for the careful development of Iago's character and for the subtle motivating of his intrigue. It is certainly true that a cold-blooded intrigue extended over four acts might have seemed at once more harrowing and less probable than one rushed through in brief time, but such a consideration seems of less importance than the necessity of establishing Iago's character and so making possible the acceptance of his villainy.

In analysing Iago's nature the first thing we note is that, in comparison with the other characters, he is a highly intellectual—or better, intelligent—man. He towers above all the rest with his fertile, acute, and normally far-sighted brain-power. At the same time he is of plebeian descent, and has obviously had no education. His intelligence is native, not cultivated. Partly because of jealous envy, partly because of the consciousness of his own capability, he is inclined to rate his native intelligence over cultured refinement. This man, of plebeian descent and responsible position, is in not too enviable a situation, and it is the consciousness of this which leads towards the development of those more purely evil characteristics which dominate the drama. Iago in his own way is to be considered, not as an individual of overweening villainy, but as a pitiful plaything of circumstance, warped in nature and in his evil bringing others to misery and ruin.

In his proud sense of his own intelligence Iago is naturally contemptuous of the weak wills of others. He despises Othello although he recognises his skill in war. He sneers at the folly of Cassio,

who, although he is "a great arithmetician," has nothing of his own mental ability. He feels nothing but contempt for the amorous and supine Roderigo. He feels that he is intellectually superior to those with whom he comes in contact. At the same time, he has always the consciousness that others may look down upon him because of his lack of birth and education. This Shakespeare stresses for us in the drinking scene. Cassio, in his cups, proves the weakness of his intellect by falling into querulous idiocy.

Fore Heauen: an excellent Song,

he exclaims after Iago's clinking verses, and, once more,

Why, this is a more exquisite Song then the other.

Iago asks if he wishes to hear it again, but Cassio's mind is turning to thoughts of his own importance:

No: for I hold him to be vnworthy of his Place, that do's those things. Well: heau'ns aboue all: and there be soules must be saued, and there be soules must not be saued. . . . For mine owne part, no offence to the Generall, nor any *man of qualitie*: I hope to be saued.

On Iago's plea for himself, his real thoughts come out:

I: (but by your leaue) not before me. The *Lieutenant* is to be saued before the Ancient.

Speeches such as these, and assuredly Iago must have heard them often, have helped to sour his spirit. He is past the days of schooling now. He has married, evidently some time since, a woman who is Desdemona's maid. Above all, he is poor.

and is forced to spend his time with the gull Rod-
erigo in order that he may fill his purse. In his
own mind is just a touch of shame that he should
be thus compelled to waste his moments in this
manner:

Thus do I euer make my Foole, my purse:
For I mine owne gain'd knowledge should prophane
If I would time expend with such [a] Sn[i]pe,
But for my Sport, and Profit.

He sees Cassio, a libertine but well-born, given a
post which he feels more fitted for. He has posed
as the honest cynic for long, nor can we doubt that
he has been honest as the world goes. He has
hitherto won his way upward by his own native
skill, but now his advancement is checked simply
because he has no birth and education.

It is on this foundation that Shakespeare has
laid his structure. Quite naturally, a man of his
upbringing and calibre would have developed a kind
of self-help philosophy which logically would develop
into a kind of Machiavellianism wherein *virtù*, the
individuality, stands for everything, and all moral
ideas are rejected as the mere props of weaker
spirits.

You shall marke
Many a dutious and knee-crooking knaue;
That (doting on his owne obsequious bondage)
Weares out his time, much like his Masters Asse,
For nought but Prouender, & when he's old Casheer'd.
Whip me such honest knaues. Others there are
Who trym'd in Formes, and visages of Dutie,
Keepe yet their hearts attending on themselues,

And throwing but shewel of Seruice on their Lords
Doe well thriue by them.

And when they haue lin'd their Coates, doe themselves
Homage:

These Fellowes have some soule.

And such a one do I professe my-selfe.

As for Machiavelli, for Iago there are but two classes of men—the honest fools and the cynical, wise knaves. This does not mean that he follows evil for its own sake. Rather does he find that obsequiousness and the formal semblance of virtue are often more profitable than any amount of knavery. Iago's "honesty" has been practised for long years so that he has become the very spirit of uprightness and Diogenian virtue for them all. So long as this pose is a paying one, Iago is content to persevere in it, but whenever he finds that his "honesty" has carried him as far as it can carry him, he feels it time to cast it off. His growing repugnance is to be seen in the second act, when he turns from Othello and Desdemona with an aside.

Oh you are well tun'd now:

But Ile set downe the peggs that make this Musicke,
As honest as I am.

His mood, therefore, is not a love of villainy as such, but merely a recognition that, when virtue becomes unprofitable, evil may be called in to aid a sensible man.

As we have seen, Iago's experience had led him to group men into the foolish and the wise. The former, he saw, were by far in the majority, and with something of Hamlet's generalising tendency he was inclined to make them seem even more

numerous than they were in reality. Still further, his was an essentially masculine nature, and the women he saw around him he not only despised but ignored. He had probably had experience of frail women. His own wife he suspects of having played him false, and Emilia's words to Desdemona show that he had some justification for his doubt. Quite naturally, then, Iago applies his standard to Desdemona and believes that, no purer than the rest, she might well sin with such a "goodly man" as Cassio. Nor can he conceive that Cassio, given such opportunity, should not aim at this great Venetian beauty:

That *Cassio* loues her, I do well beleeu't:
That she loues him, 'tis apt, and of great Credite.

His ideas of men and of women are wholly formed on his own experience and on his own theories, which are themselves thoroughly self-interested:

Oh villanous: I haue look'd vpon the world for foure times seuen yeares, and since I could distinguish betwixt a Benefit, and an Injurie: I never found man that knew how to loue himselfe. Ere I would say, I would drown my selfe for the loue of a Gynney Hen, I would change my Humanity with a Baboone. . . . Vertue? A figge, 'tis in our selues that we are thus, or thus. . . . [Love] is meerly a Lust of the blood, and a permission of the will. Come, be a man: drown thy selfe? Drown Cats, and blind Puppies.

Iago's philosophy—a picture of true Machiavellianism—is as clearly painted for us as might be; nor is there anything wrong for a man in his position to be a cynic. After all, cynicism is a kind of perverted idealism, and, even as Desdemona's

romance might have been cured by a glance at some of the more seamy sides of life, so Iago's cynicism might have been cured by looking more closely at her purity. This may not have been so impossible as it seems, for Shakespeare apparently put a touch of poetry into Iago's being. In the very first scene his words take on a richness and colouring which seems for a moment out of harmony with his villainy, and later, when he conjures up that vision of poppy, mandragora, and all the drowsy syrups of the world, we see a glint of poetry. Here, perhaps, we are given a hint of the might-have-been.

When the play opens Iago's only crime is that of cheating Roderigo of money—but he has serious grievances which he airs to his "fool":

Three Great-ones of the Cittie,
(In personall suite to make me his Lieutenant)
Off-capt to him: and by the faith of man
I know my price, I am worth no worsse a place.
But he (as louing his own pride, and purposes)
Euades them, with a bombast Circumstance,
Horribly stufft with Epithites of warre,
And, in conclusion,
Non-suites my Mediators. For certes, saies he,
I have already chose my Officer. And what was he?
For-sooth, a great Arithmatician,
One *Michaell Cassio*, a *Florentine*. . . .
And I . . . must be be-leed, and calm'd
By Debitor, and Creditor. This Counter-caster,
He (in good time) must his Lieutenant be,
And I (God blesse the marke) his Mooreships Auntient. . . .
Now Sir, be iudge your selfe,
Whether I in any iust term am Affin'd
To loue the *Moore*?

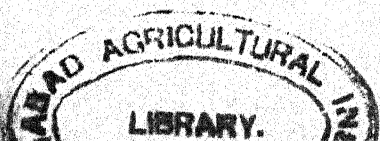
The crisis in his career has come. He has followed Othello only for his own ends:

In following him, I follow but my selfe.
Heaven is my Iudge, not I for loue and dutie,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end.

His first action has nothing of a deliberate intrigue about it. The calling up of Brabantio is a chance action inspired by a desire to harass Othello as much as lies in his power. Thereafter we lose sight of him till the close of the act, when, in his first soliloquy, he wonders whether he might not be able to emmesh Cassio and Othello in the one net:

I hate the Moore,
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He ha's done my Office. I know not if't be true,
But I, for meere suspicion in that kinde,
Will do, as if for Surety. He holds me well,
The better shall my purpose worke on him:
Cassio's a proper man: Let me see now,
To get his Place, and to plume vp my will
In double Knauery. How? how? Let's see.
After some time, to abuse *Othello's* eares,
That he is too familiar with his wife:
He hath a person, and a smooth dispose
To be suspected: fram'd to make women false.

It is important to note that, in formulating this idea, Iago has not the slightest thought of any tragic conclusion. Misjudging men according to his own standards he does not suspect that Othello will burst into such a fury. This is his self-deception, for the gods are laughing at him, too, when he enters upon his intrigue with the lightness of heart of a man too confident in his own cleverness.



When next we encounter Iago he is in Cyprus, actively pursuing what, as his second soliloquy shows, are but half-formed plans. He has not definitely made up his mind what to do. For a moment he thinks of making attacks on Desdemona himself, but, realising that she would hardly accept a plebeian such as he, the old idea once more takes possession of his fancy:

Ile haue our *Michael Cassio* on the hip,
 Abuse him to the Moore, in the right garbe. . . .
 Make the Moore thanke me, loue me, and reward me,
 For making him egregiously an Asse,
 And practising vpon his peace, and quiet,
 Even to madnesse.

Othello, Iago knows, will fly into a passion, but he never imagines he will do more than cast off Desdemona. Still will he love and thank his ancient. So far Iago's main idea is to get Cassio out of office; the other part of his intrigue, spurred by revenge, is "yet confused." His third soliloquy stresses only the first:

Now 'mongst this Flocke of drunkards
 Am I [to] put our *Cassio* in some Action
 That may offend the Isle.

As we know, he succeeds perfectly. Cassio is degraded; but from this moment Iago is in a trap. In the first place, the lieutenancy is not at once given to him. In the second, Cassio might still be restored to favour. Thirdly, Roderigo needs constant attention. Fourthly, the other part of Iago's plot is unaccomplished. Lastly, and most important of all, his own delight in his superior skill

draws him on to further action. Iago, the potential artist, is caught in the toils of his own genius. Pleasure and action, he tells us, make the hours seem short, and this joy in his own workmanship, added to the necessity of dismissing Roderigo and Cassio, sweeps him off his feet. The only method at his command is to abuse the Moor. His suggestion to Cassio that he should approach Desdemona is the beginning of the forward movement of the second intrigue, and its very cleverness gives him delight:

And what's he then, that saies I play the Villaine?
When this aduise is free I giue, and honest.
Proball to thinking, and indeed the course
To win the Moore againe. For 'tis most easie
Th' inclyning *Desdemona* to subdue
In any honest Suite. . . . How am I then a Villaine
To Counsell *Cassio* to this paralell course,
Directly to his good? Diuinitie of hell. . . .

The bare necessity of his action becomes of less import than the pleasure he takes from its subtlety.

The actual poisoning of Othello's mind begins not until the third scene of the third act. In spite of a hesitation which betrays a certain fear in Iago's mind that he has gone too far, the ancient is thoroughly successful in gaining the lieutenancy, but now he cannot stay his hand. He is no longer the centre of the action. He has set Othello's passions aflame, and the conflagration now roars onward beyond his power. The hesitation noted in the third act increases as we advance:

This is the night
That either makes me, or foredoes me quight.

From that time on we do not see him until he is brought in guarded, his house of cards fallen in grievous ruin about him. The night had "fordone him quite." Firm-lipped he stands, with exquisite courage, refusing to explain his actions:

Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:
From this time forth, I neuer will speake word.

Even Gratiano's tortures, we realise, will not force him to utter a syllable. Iago's end is the best part of his life as we see it presented in the play, and the courage he displays there must have been introduced by Shakespeare for some definite purpose. That purpose, I believe, was to raise an element of sympathy in the audience for this "villain." There is, after all, something pitiful in this man's final doom. He who might have been so great, who had such intelligence and capability, he whose villainy does not seem to have been born with him but to have been the product of circumstance, is caught in the toils of the gods.

This view of Iago as a character to be pitied is based primarily upon an examination of his own words in the play, but it is strengthened by two other considerations. First, Iago, unlike the mere puppets Regan and Goneril, is a full-length portrait. To interpret Iago as a melodramatic villain shatters entirely the structure of the play. Such a conception robs Othello and Cassio and the whole of their company of true human value. If, on the other hand, we think of Iago as a youth of outwardly blameless life, with every appearance of honesty but with a true Machiavellian doctrine of his own

which makes him deny the usual morality of men, we begin to see how the various figures fit into the tragic unity. This tragic unity raises the second point. We can hardly witness a drama with harmonious and undivided attention when all our emotions of detestation, hate, and disgust are called out against a principal character in that drama. The conception of Iago I have outlined gives him a definite position in this play of deception and of self-deception.

In *Othello*, then, Shakespeare seems to have been carrying on his study in idealism opposed to reality. In *Hamlet* he had shown the idealism of a cultured and refined nature. In *Desdemona* he showed the idealism of a refined but unintellectual character. In *Iago* he shows the perverted idealism of a man of no refinement but of tremendous native intelligence. The variation of this theme in *Othello* himself may now briefly be considered.

Coleridge and Professor Bradley both hold the view that any husband would have fallen victim to Iago's insinuations, but this judgment rests on a misconception of Shakespearian tragedy—that the tragic themes are general. The truth is that *Othello* is deceived by Iago precisely because he is *Othello*, because he has just those qualities which form suitable soil for the implanting and flourishing of Iago's suggestions. Had *Hamlet* been in *Othello*'s place, we cannot doubt but that Iago within a day would have been flying from Cyprus as fast as a cutter could carry him.

The first and primal reason for *Othello*'s succumbing to Iago's insinuations lies in his lack of intellect.

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He wants both the latter's native talent and Cassio's scholarly education. He is a fine soldier, brave, honest, but by no means clever or having the power of reading men's thoughts. Iago himself draws his character:

The Moore is of a free, and open Nature,
That thinkes men honest, that but seeme to be so,
And will so tenderly be led by th' Nose
As Asses are.

This lack of intellect gives free reign to his passions.

Now by Heauen,
My blood begins my safer Guides to rule,
And passion (hauing my best iudgement collied)
Assaies to leade the way,

he cries after the carousal scene, showing the fatal tendency of his nature. Othello's strength is physical rather than mental.

This lack of intellect in itself, of course, gives merely the basis of his nature. Othello is marked, not only by this want, but by the quality of self-deception, revealed, as with *Desdemona*, in a peculiar romantic fervour. His whole tendency is to look at life idealistically. What appeals to him in war is the pomp and circumstance of soldiering:

Oh farewell,
Farewell the neighing Steed, and the shrill Trumpe,
The Spirit-stirring Drum, th' Eare piercing Fife,
The Royal Banner, and all Qualitie,
Pride, Pompe, and Circumstance of glorious Warre:
And O you mortall Engines, whose rude throates
Th' immortall Ioues dread Clamours counterfet,
Farewell.

He looks upon the world as a rare pageant. He has the idealist's tendency to exalt what he loves and to fix his life wholly upon that. "My life vpon her faith!" he makes answer to Brabantio's warning, and when this faith seems shattered his whole occupation is gone. Even Desdemona's supposed infidelity is viewed by him in an idealistic way. He ceases to look on her as his wife and rises to a generalisation:

It is the Cause, it is the Cause (my Soule)
Let me not name it to you, you chaste Starres,
It is the Cause. Yet Ile not shed her blood,
Nor scarre that whiter skin of hers, then Snow,
And smooth as Monumentall Alabaster:
Yet she must dye, else shee'l betray more men:
Put out the Light, and then pu out the Light.

Opposed to this tendency is his knowledge of a certain part of reality. He is a man who has lived his life in camps. Iago suspects him of adultery with Emilia, and this is not denied throughout the whole of the play: rather is it intensified by Emilia's own words. He shows that he knows the language of the brothel:

Mistris,
That have the office opposite to Saint *Peter*,
And keepe the gate of hell. You, you: I you,
We have done our course: there's money for your paines:
I pray you turne the key, and keepe our counsaile.

The part of life he knows is that part which is associated with women of Emilia's and Bianca's character. Owing to his lack of intellect this portion of life clashes with his romanticism. There is no jealousy in his mind before Iago speaks, but doubt is certainly

lying subconscious there. The cardinal scene in the play is the third scene of the third act. On it Shakespeare obviously must have concentrated most. At the opening of this scene Iago first breathes a hint of suspicion. At the close Othello is crying

Damne her lewde Minx: O damne her, damne her.
Come go with me a-part, I will withdraw
To furnish me with some swift meanes of death
For the faire Diuell.

The duration of the action is not more than a few minutes, yet here is Othello passing from a state of supposedly complete trust in his wife to a passion that knows no bounds. Is this probable of a man "not easily jealous"? The first part of this scene deserves further attention. Desdemona, Cassio, and Emilia enter; Cassio moves away. "Hah? I like not that," ejaculates Iago, and Othello turns to him with a "What dost thou say?" From that moment his short sentences show him plunged in thought:

Was not that *Cassio* parted from my wife? . . .

I do beleeeue 'twas he. . . .

Who is't you meane? . . .

Went he hence now? . . .

Not now (sweet *Desdemon*) some other time.

No, not to-night. . . .

I shall not dine at home:

I meete the Captaines at the Cittadell. . . .

Prythee no more: Let him come when he will:

I will deny thee nothing. . . .

I will deny thee nothing.

Whereon, I do beseech thee, grant me this,

To leaue me but a little to my selfe. . . .

Farewell my *Desdemona*, Ile come to thee strait.

At the conclusion his thoughts take utterance:

Excellent wretch: Perdition catch my Soule
But I do loue thee: *and when I love thee not,*
Chaos is come againe.

"And when I love thee not"—surely here lies one of Shakespeare's clues. To believe that Othello's suspicions were not in embryo before ever Iago spoke is to deny all meaning to Shakespeare's lines. Othello perhaps cheats himself, certainly cheats others, in his affirmation that he is in no wise inclined towards jealousy:

Why? why is this?
Think'st thou, I'd make a Life of Iealousie;
To follow still the changes of the Moone
With fresh suspicions. . . .
'Tis not to make me Iealious,
To say my wife is faire, feeds well, loues company,
Is free of Speech, Sings, Playes, and Dances:
Where Vertue is, these are more vertuous. . . .
No *Iago*,
Ile see before I doubt; when I doubt, proue;
And on the prooffe, there is no more but this,
Away at once with Loue, or Iealousie.

Most commentators take these words as a correct analysis of Othello's nature; they overlook the fact that, *without proof*, he is damning his wife and planning her murder. There is no need to dwell on Iago's insinuations; these carry on the play without adding anything new. Othello's die is cast in this one scene.

Deception and self-deception, then, subtly intermingled with the theme of idealism and reality, are

the keynotes to Othello. Desdemona deceives her father at the beginning of the tragedy and ends with a lie on her lips. Othello appears in the first act as deceiving himself or his auditors with his declaration that he is "rude of speech"—presenting instead of a "round unvarnish'd tale" one of the most subtle pieces of oratory outside of Antony's similar harangue. He dies with a misconception of his own nature. There is thus a definite unity of effect running through the whole drama. Iago, Desdemona, and Othello, in spite of their difference, all take their parts in the one fatal atmosphere.

This atmosphere of romanticism and ideality is, it may be noted, further emphasised by Othello's colour. There can be no doubt that the hero for Shakespeare was a negro with "sooty breast" and "thick lips," and unquestionably the author, in taking his story from Cinthio, saw that the contrast of Othello and Desdemona would but stress still further the romanticism of their characters. Neither he nor she look upon their mutual love in the light of reality, the light in which Brabantio and Coleridge saw it. He loved her innocent soul, only once speaking of her beauty; she saw his visage in his mind. It seems to me that only by disregarding false nineteenth-century criticism, by presenting this tragedy as an essay in deception and self-deception, both shown by a variety of carefully contrasted characters all depicted according to the one plan or idea, can we give full force, either in study or on stage, to the singular unity and harmony of tone which mark out *Othello* as Shakespeare's most complex and perhaps his subtlest drama.

V

THE TRAGEDIE OF MACBETH

THE problem of *Macbeth* is a much simpler one than the problems presented in *Hamlet* and in *Othello* respectively. The play, indeed, at first sight seems to show a falling-off in Shakespeare's penetrating subtlety. In *Hamlet* he had made of an ordinary melodramatic story a wonderful study in the delineation of character by concentrating upon one prime figure. In *Othello* he had similarly succeeded in rendering a tale of what might have been merely sordid murder into a story of universal significance by stressing a certain dominant note and presenting a number of characters upon the stage as different exemplifications of this one idea. When we come to *Macbeth*, on the other hand, we discover a strange simplicity in the tragedy. The characters are boldly delineated, and there are fewer of those more delicate hints which illuminate the earlier dramas. It is as if Shakespeare had here concentrated more upon atmosphere than upon character. Neither *Hamlet* nor *Othello* has that peculiarly emphasised spirit enwrapping it which is so evident in this the third play of his famous quatrology; and we may suspect that the explanation lies in Shakespeare's constant endeavour to secure the ever-necessary unity of impression.

✓ In construction, too, *Macbeth* is unique. Commentators and critics have never ceased to note and to analyse the feeling of rushing swiftness which

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marks out this drama. *Hamlet* moves with deliberate slowness; *Othello* develops hardly at all till the middle of the third act. In *Macbeth*, on the contrary, not only are we swept at once into the midst of the tragic action, but the main event—the murder of Duncan—is completed before the close of Act II. It almost seems as if once more Shakespeare had been experimenting, presenting thus a counterpart to *Othello*. Whereas the latter tragedy moves swiftly only in the last two acts, *Macbeth* develops rapidly only in the first two, the interest falling off as we reach the end. This atmosphere of swiftness, of course, may only be apparent. Even although we recognise that the main structure of the play could hardly have been vastly different from what it now is, we must acknowledge that the Folio text does not seem to have preserved for us Shakespeare's original draft of the tragedy. *Macbeth* is barely half the length of *Hamlet*, which has 3924 lines to the 1993 of the former, and falls well below *Othello* (3324 lines) and *Lear* (3298 lines). There are signs within the play itself of added passages, such as the Hecate scene, and as many signs of deliberate cuts. It is impossible now to reconstruct the original sequence of events, but all the evidence appears to point to a drastic revision made, either by Shakespeare or by his actor-companions, when, for some reason, the necessity arose for a shortened version of the play. The problem is complicated by the presence of the witches' songs both in Middleton's drama of *The Witch* and in the adaptation of *Macbeth* in 1673. It is difficult to determine exactly the proportion of Shakespearian matter in

the common portions, but a careful investigation of the three texts has led me to believe that the songs, originally Shakespeare's, were carried over to *The Witch* at the revival of that drama, and were preserved intact in the 1673 stage version. The details are not of great importance, but we have to note that in the *Macbeth* of the First Folio we have perhaps only half of the *Macbeth* which Shakespeare originally penned, and that consequently the swift movement of the drama and the lack of subtlety in the characterisation may be deceptive.

✓ Still another problem faces us, but this may easily be dismissed. It is quite evident that Shakespeare, in writing *Macbeth*, was penning a play which might well attract the ears and eyes of Scottish royalty in the person of James I. Not only is the theme Scottish, but the references to the Union of the Crowns, to the touching for the King's Evil, and to the power of the witches must have been introduced with more than half a glance towards Court favour. Is the comparative weakness of *Macbeth* due to this pandering to the tastes and predilections of a monarch? The answer, it would appear, must be in the negative. All through his life Shakespeare was thus watching passing fancies and fashions in his audience. There is no reason to suppose that the mere necessity of writing to attract spectators made him less of an artist. The very fact that he could thus magnificently give to the public what it wanted and remain himself the marvellous genius that he was proves him the greater man. A minor poet may often write pleasing things to delight himself; it is only the master mind of surpassing strength who

can come down into the arena and still be true to his own nature. That *Macbeth* was written, then, to please a particular public does not in any wise make it different from Shakespeare's other plays; it is at one with his whole dramatic practice.

- ✓ 'What makes *Macbeth* peculiar is that it is Shakespeare's first study in pure villainy since his very earliest days. 'There is certainly Iago, but after all Iago is only a part of *Othello* and is set in sharp contrast with the Moor and his wife. Claudius in *Hamlet*, as we have seen, is by no means an absolute study in evil and is at best a subordinate, almost puppet, figure. Even when we come later to *Lear* we find that Regan and Goneril, although darker figures than Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, are hustled unceremoniously into the background of the picture.
- ✓ In this tragedy, on the other hand, Macbeth and his wife stand out from first to last. There is no attempt on Shakespeare's part to relieve the bareness of their villainy by emphasising the goodness and the nobility of other characters. This, in a way, marks still another great dramatic experiment on Shakespeare's part, and once more we have to assume that he was fully conscious of the tremendous difficulty which lay in his path, a difficulty already diagnosed by Aristotle centuries before his time. An audience, witnessing villainy centred in the midst of a drama, will fail as a rule to sympathise with the main characters. / Shakespeare's task, there- ✓
 fore, was to make the evil of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth quite apparent, to gloze over nothing of their criminal actions—as, for example, later dramatists such as Ford were inclined to do at the cost

of all higher nobility in their works—and at the same time to make his hero and heroine sympathetic characters. There appear to be but three ways of presenting villainy on the stage. The first is the method adopted in *Othello* and in Heywood's *The English Traveller* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, where the evil is set alongside of, and is mitigated by, the good and the noble. The second is the method, cited above, of Ford and his companions, where the evil is glozed over and made "poetic" but where there is sacrificed that higher spirit, that universal morality, which seems necessary in works of highest art. (The third way, and the most difficult, is this which Shakespeare, always daring greatly, essayed in *Macbeth*.) It must now be our task to analyse some of the methods by which he secured his effect.†

✓ †Already it has been observed that *Macbeth*, more than any other of Shakespeare's plays, is enwrapped in a certain distinctive atmosphere, the atmosphere of the supernatural. The ghost in *Hamlet* arouses not at all the peculiar emotion which comes to us on reading *Macbeth*. The play opens with thunder and lightning on a desert place, with the weird broken sentences of the nightly hags. The witches reappear again when first Macbeth enters upon the stage and the element of the supernatural is writ large over Macbeth's words to Macduff in the final scene of the play. No one of Shakespeare's dramas has quite this pervasive note of the uncanny penetrating its whole structure. Compared with this the ghost in *Hamlet* is merely an incidental figure. |

| The real object of this intensification of the super-

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natural is twofold. On the one hand, as elsewhere I have endeavoured to show, it aids in arousing that feeling of universality which is more than ever necessary in a drama of criminality such as this is. We feel that we are not in the presence of the simple murder of a king but in that of a cosmic tragedy which, although it has realistic features, cannot be precisely related to our ordinary life. We are raised, that is to say, by this means to a plane higher than that of everyday existence. This, undoubtedly, whether conscious or not, was Shakespeare's first object in emphasising through scene after scene the supermundane elements in *Macbeth*. At the same time, Shakespeare rarely dogmatizes concerning the supernatural, and the witches, along with the ghost of Banquo, are left in a region of indefinite suggestion which is much more effective than any amount of direct statement could have been. It is this indeterminate position of his supermundane elements that gives to Shakespeare another great object in his introduction of these figures. The fact that this atmosphere enwraps *Macbeth* as a play, serves to take away part of the sin from Macbeth himself, for the witches, in one way, may be regarded as evil geniuses who tempt Macbeth to his ruin. They breathe hoarse yet honeyed words into his ambitious ear; they flatter him with false prophecies and deceitful shows. Regarded from one point of view they are the evil forces in the tragedy, and Macbeth is simply the tool in their hands. But this is not a complete survey of the problem. While this impression is in the mind of almost every reader and spectator of *Macbeth*, we

cannot conceive that this was Shakespeare's fundamental conception in the penning of his play. For him tragedy is the tragedy of character as well as the tragedy of fate. So, if we look at the witches from the other point of view, they become little else than embodiments of his own evil desires. They suggest to him nothing that he has not already thought of.

Faire is foule, and foule is faire,

cry all the hags in unison before they meet the general, and Macbeth, on entering the stage, utters their own words:

So foule and faire a day I haue not seene.

Banquo is amazed at Macbeth's confusion and pre-occupation when he hears the fatal prophecy:

Good Sir, why doe you start, and seeme to feare
Things that doe sound so faire. . . .

My Noble Partner

You greet with present Grace, and great prediction
Of Noble hauing, and of Royall hope.
That he seemes wrapt withall.

Macbeth's cry of "Would they had stay'd," expresses his feelings, and his pointed remark to Banquo:

Your Children shall be Kings

shows that his mind was already turning over the possibilities of the situation.

Glamys, and *Thane* of Cawdor:
The greatest is behinde. . . .

Two Truths are told,
As happy Prologues to the swelling Act

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Of the Imperiall Theame. . . .

I am *Thane* of Cawdor.

If good? why doe I yeeld to that suggestion,
Whose horrid Image doth unfix my Heire,
And make my seated Heart knock at my Ribbes,
Against the vse of Nature—

—all these are the expressions not of a man who is suddenly struck by a new thought, but of one who had already, perhaps not always in conscious meditation, yielded to hopes and desires of a similar nature, and who had considered the possibility of treachery.

Looke how our Partner's rapt

says the as yet untouched Banquo. His thoughts are pure, and even the witches' prophecy cannot disturb the equanimity of his reflections. We cannot doubt that the contrast of Banquo and of Macbeth in this scene was conscious and deliberate.

This impression of Macbeth's nature before ever the witches had spoken to him is strengthened by an examination of later parts of the play. In the fifth scene of the first act Lady Macbeth is presented as reading a letter from her husband. It is a letter in which he retells the events of the day shown earlier on the stage. Macbeth has had no conversation with her, and yet she bursts out in a torrent of enthusiasm concerning that very thing, the thought of which had terrified the thane on the barren heath:

Glamys thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promis'd: yet doe I feare thy Nature,
It is too full o' th' Milke of humane kindnesse,

To catch the nearest way. Thou would'st be great,
Art not without Ambition, but without
The illnesse should attend it. . . .

High thee hither,
That I may powre my Spirits in thine Eare,
And chastise with the valour of my Tongue
All that impeides thee from the Golden Round,
Which Fate and Metaphysicall ayde doth seeme
To have thee crown'd withall.

Such a soliloquy can be explained only by the assumption that Macbeth had spoken to his wife concerning the possibility of the murder of Duncan, or that his "letters," which she mentions later in the same scene, had contained matter relative to this—a supposition less likely, considering the danger attendant upon it. So, too, by such a supposition only can we explain her cry of

Thou'rt mad to say it,

when the messenger announces Duncan's impending arrival, and her further soliloquy in which she assumes that the murder has already been arranged:

X
The Rauen himselfe is hoarse,
That croakes the fatall entrance of *Duncan*
Vnder my Battlements. Come you Spirits,
That tend on mortall thoughts, vnsex me here,
And fill me from the Crowne to the Toe, top-full
Of direst Crueltie: make thick my blood,
Stop vp th' accesse, and passage to Remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keepe peace betweene
Th' effect, and hit. Come to my Womans Brests,
And take my Milke for Gall, you murth'ring Ministers,
Where-euer, in your sightlesse substances,

X
You wait on Natures Mischiefe. Come thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoake of Hell,
That my keene Knife see not the Wound it makes,
Nor Heauen peepe through the Blanket of the darke,
To cry, hold, hold.

Macbeth's words when he enters immediately after reveal clearly the fact that he has spoken on this theme before:

My dearest Loue,
Duncan comes here to Night. . . .
To-morrow, *as he purposes*.

Unless we presume a decision already made between him and his wife we can make nothing of Lady Macbeth's reply:

O neuer,
Shall Sunne that Morrow see.
Your face, my *Thane*, is as a Booke, where men
May reade strange matters. . . .
He that's comming,
Must be provided for: and you shall put
This Nights great Businesse into my dispatch,
Which shall to all our Nights, and Dayes to come,
Giue solely soueraigne sway, and Masterdome.

There are thus two distinct points of view from which we may regard the witches. We can see in them evil ministers tempting Macbeth to destruction, or we can look on them merely as embodiments of ambitious thoughts which had already moved Macbeth and his wife to murderous imaginings. The peculiar thing to note is that through Shakespeare's subtle and suggestive art we do not regard these two points of view as mutually antagonistic. There is a land, says William Blake, where con-

traries are both true, and that land may be found in Shakespeare's tragic art. The witches form the keynote, the very atmosphere, of *Macbeth*, and yet their power may be reasoned away, must, indeed, be reasoned away, if we are to understand the characters of the thane and his wife aright. |

| The same or a similar peculiarity is to be seen in the presentation of Banquo's ghost and in the various other supernatural elements introduced into the tragedy. The ghost of Banquo is a material vision in the sense that it rises upon the stage; and yet it is but an hallucination of Macbeth's own mind. Not only do the other innocent characters fail to see it, but even Lady Macbeth finds it invisible. While this ghost, therefore, is utilised by Shakespeare for the purpose of intensifying the particular atmosphere of the drama, it is barely anything more than a mere vision called forth from Macbeth's diseased and disordered imagination. ¶ So, too, with the mention of fatal omens witnessed by one or another character in the drama. Elsewhere I have drawn attention to the strange subtlety in the speech of Lenox:

X
The Night ha's been vnruely: Where we lay,
Our Chimneys were blowne downe, and (*as they say*)
Lamentings heard i' th' Ayre: strange schreemes of Death,
And Prophecying, with Accents terrible
Of dyre Combustion, and confus'd Euent,
New hatch'd to th' wofull time. The obscure Bird
Clamor'd the liue-long Night. *Some say*, the Earth
Was feverous, and did shake.

| A storm, chimneys blown down, and the hooting of

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an owl are events not in themselves by any means thrilling or supernatural—and such only Lenox professes himself to have seen or heard; yet Lenox's whole speech harmonises with the atmosphere of the tragedy, and even in its vagueness aids in intensifying the spirit of the drama. The same phenomenon is to be witnessed in the conversation of Ross with an old man. | Here once more supernatural events are alluded to, but the only direct statements are that

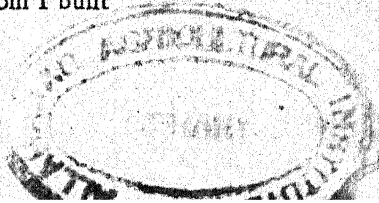
On Tuesday last,
A Faulcon trowing in her pride of place,
Was by a Mowsing Owle hawkt at, and kill'd . . .
And *Duncans* Horses . . .
Beauteous, and swift, the Minions of their Race,
Turn'd wilde in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst Obedience, as they would make
Warre with Mankind.

| In exactly the same manner the tragic irony of the drama, which itself contributes towards the strengthening of the general fatal sense, may be explained away on purely rationalistic grounds. What is more poignant, and what is at the same time more natural than Duncan's exclamation when he hears of Macbeth's prowess—

O valiant Cousin, worthy Gentleman ?

Or his application to Macbeth of the title "noble" ?
Or his words in a later scene:

There's no Art,
To find the Mindes construction in the Face:
He was a Gentleman, on whom I built
An absolute Trust ?



All of these, and a dozen other similar phrases—for *Macbeth* is full of tragic irony—act on our minds in the creation of that fatal sense which overshadows the play, yet not one but seems in the circumstances most natural and inevitable. In respect of the supernatural, if it falls short of *Hamlet* and *Othello* in other ways, *Macbeth* may be held to be the most subtle of Shakespeare's tragedies. The ghost in *Hamlet* is crude when compared with this.

Besides providing this general atmosphere of the supernatural and overlooming fate, Shakespeare introduced in the figure of Banquo a character who practically duplicated Macbeth, and, in doing so, he succeeded in strengthening the feeling of the occult and in securing an atmosphere of universality. Banquo holds in *Macbeth* the same position that Horatio holds in *Hamlet*, and quite conceivably the two parts were written for the one actor. Both characters are subordinated in the plays in which they appear; both act, in different ways, as foils to the respective heroes. When he first appears, Banquo is, unlike Macbeth, a wholly untempted and noble person. The words of the witches touch him not at all. He asks simply for a prophecy for himself:

My Noble Partner

You greet with present Grace, and great prediction
Of Noble hauing, and of Royall hope.
That he seemes wrapt withall: to me you speake not,
If you can looke into the Seedes of Time,
And say, which Graine will grow, and which will not,
Speake then to me, who neyther begge, nor feare
Your fauors, nor your hate.

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When the weird sisters vanish, his words are calm and unimpassioned:

The Earth hath bubbles, as the Water ha's,
And these are of them.

His first shock comes, as Professor Bradley has well pointed out, when the messengers arrive to acquaint Macbeth of his new honours. "What," he cries, "can the devil speak true?" Still, however, his mind is at rest. His "very gladly" to Macbeth's query is a careless answer and contrasts markedly with his more eager "At your kind'st leisure," when evil reflections are later passing through his mind. In the scene following that of the heath, Banquo's simplicity is placed in close juxtaposition with Macbeth's nervous and hypocritical oratory to Duncan, and thereafter we lose sight of him until he enters once more to present to us that last delightful picture of fresh outer air before the hell-gates close upon us. At the opening of the second act, and, be it noted, before Macbeth's crime, he is an altered man:

A heauie Summons lyes like Lead vpon me,
And yet I would not sleepe: Mercifull Powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that Nature
Giues way to in repose.

He hears Macbeth entering, and, with nerves unstrung, he calls to Fleance for his sword. In a few moments he has reverted to his original meditations:

I dreamt last Night of the three weyward Sisters:
To you they haue shew'd some truth.

Once more he disappears from the stage. Duncan

is murdered, and the guests come rushing in to view the dismal scene of guilt. All talk frenziedly, confusedly, but Banquo stands watching and suspicious. It is he who answers Lady Macbeth grimly:

Too cruell, any where.

He realises, or thinks he realises, the crime of Macbeth:

Feares and scruples shake vs :
In the great Hand of God I stand, and thence,
Amidst the vndivulg'd pretence, I fight
Of Treasonous Mallice.

For the moment his nobler qualities gain control; but when we next see him, he is sunk again into his evil thoughts:

Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weyard Women promis'd, and I feare
Thou playd'st most fowly for't: yet it was saide
It should not stand in thy Posterity,
But that my selfe should be the Roote, and Father
Of many Kings. If there come truth from them,
As vpon thee *Macbeth*, their Speeches shine,
Why by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my Oracles as well
And set me vp in hope. But hush, no more.

By the end of that act he is lying murdered on the ground. We have seen enough, however, to know that his thoughts were moving in a line parallel with those of Macbeth. Our belief in the power of the witches is strengthened, while at the same time we realise that Banquo's reflections are perfectly natural and might be uninspired by any force from without.

| For Shakespeare's dramatic purposes, the presence of Banquo aids in conjuring before us the feeling or emotion that Macbeth is not an isolated figure, and that his evil is not a terrible thing personal to himself.

| As a third device for taking away from us the awful impression of Macbeth's crime, and for raising in us some sympathy for the main characters, Shakespeare has depicted his hero as a man of essentially noble character, brave, fearless, and honoured by all with whom he comes in contact. As a general, he is successful and trusted, as a man, beloved. There is nothing evil in his nature save the one fatal flaw which leads him to final destruction. His home life is undisturbed; he is not sensual; he is not willingly cruel. | Unlike Iago, he has no subtlety in his crime, and he has no background of "Machiavellian" thought. The very thought of his deed unfixes his hair and makes his seated heart knock at his ribs. His famous soliloquy shows his full consciousness of his own guilt:

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well,
 It were done quickly: If th' Assassination
 Could trammell vp the Consequence, and catch
 With his surcease, Successe: that but this blow
 Might be the be-all, and the end-all. Heere,
 But heere, vpon this Banke and Schoole of time,
 Wee'd iumpe the life to come. But in these Cases,
 We still haue iudgement heere, that we but teach
 Bloody Instructions, which being taught, returne
 To plague th' Inuenter. This euen-handed Iustice
 Commends th' Ingredients of our poyson'd Chalice
 To our owne lips. Hee's heere in double trust;

First, as I am his Kinsman, and his Subject,
Strong both against the Deed: then, as his Host,
Who should against his Murtherer shut the doore,
Not beare the knife my selfe. Besides, this *Duncane*
Hath borne his Faculties so meeke: hath bin
So cleere in his great Office, that his Vertues
Will pleade like Angels, Trumpet-tongu'd against
The deepe damnation of his taking-off.

¶ He is no born villain. / His face reveals his secret,
and, even when the whole crime has been arranged,
he would withdraw:

We will proceed no further in this Businesse:
He hath Honour'd me of late, and I have bought
Golden Opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worne now in their newest glosse,
Not cast aside so soone.

| The whole horror of his crime comes upon him
again as he grasps at the airy dagger which moves
in front of his feverish and bloodshot eyes. This
presentation of Macbeth as a man to whom every
horror of his murder was evident before ever he
had stabbed Duncan must assuredly have been
conscious on Shakespeare's part; such a presentation
was necessary if the audience were not to turn
horror-stricken from the scene before them. As it
is, seeing in Macbeth a singularly noble and poetic
nature driven to a terrible crime, we feel for him
a definite sympathy even while we condemn his
action. |

¶ With Lady Macbeth the case was different. For
the purposes of his drama, no less than for the variety
of character delineation, the dramatist had to show

in her that power of will and ruthless determination which her husband lacked. Without such a spur to the sides of his intent, such a man as Macbeth could never have steeled himself to his loathly, self-appointed task. Lady Macbeth, then, is drawn as the incarnation of resolute will. She has none of those qualms and fears which shake Macbeth. Such a figure, it might well be felt, could not possibly elicit sympathy from an audience; but Shakespeare has so modified this conception that the essential sympathy is not only possible but inevitable. Lady Macbeth is by no means a devil incarnate. She has to assume, certainly, an air of unconquerable resolution in order to compel Macbeth to commit the murder, but she has many human feelings and emotions:

I haue giuen Sucke, and know
How tender 'tis to loue the Babe that milkes me—

the very phrase shows her to be not a mere monster. / Nor has she power to enter upon horror without stimulant:

That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold:
What hath quench'd them, hath giuen me fire . . .
Alack, I am afraid they haue awak'd,
And 'tis not done: th' attempt, and not the deed,
Confounds vs: hearke: I lay'd their Daggers ready,
He could not misse 'em. Had he not resembled
My Father as he slept, I had don't.

| The truth is that Lady Macbeth is in reality a somewhat frail figure. When she is alone, she collapses; it is only when at sudden moments of excitement she rouses all her energies that she can

assume that air of calm resolution, of cruel purpose, which for some critics is her sole nature. | This is evident when we compare her words quoted immediately above with her crushing replies to Macbeth as he enters trembling from the bed chamber:

Infirme of purpose:

Give me the Daggers: the sleeping, and the dead,
Are but as Pictures: 'tis the Eye of Child-hood,
That feares a painted Deuill.

| She is a woman who by sheer will-power has crushed in herself a certain part of her own being, that part which is æsthetic and moral. In this way she is, as Professor Moulton declares, a representative of the inner life, and has accordingly qualities which make her the direct counterpart of her husband. Whereas Macbeth pales at imagined horrors, she pales at reality. She is strained in that scene wherein the murder is discovered, and, as is evident from Banquo's suspicious remark, in her excitement she almost reveals her fatal secret. Macbeth raises his voice in a torment of affected grief and consternation, relating how in a fit of fury he had slain the grooms. It is at this moment that Lady Macbeth faints. | That her faint is real and not merely a device to take attention from her husband would, I feel, seem to have been Shakespeare's intention, for in later scenes we see her endeavouring to stay by his side and so to prevent his guilty countenance disclosing their common crime. It is the reality, as presented in the murder of the grooms, which comes as a shock upon her spirit and causes her to lose control of herself. For several scenes we lose

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sight of her, but when she does appear again it is to give utterance to her weariness of spirit:

Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer, to be that which we destroy,
Then by destruction dwell in doubtfull ioy.

This, however, is only to herself. On Macbeth's entrance she steels herself again into an apparent firmness of mind:

How now, my Lord, why doe you keepe alone?
Of sorryest Fancies your Companions making,
Vsing those Thoughts, which should indeed haue dy'd
With them they thinke on: things without all remedie
Should be without regard: what's done, is done . . .

Come on;

Gentle my Lord, sleeke o're your rugged Lookes,
Be bright and Iouiall among your Guests to Night.

She even finds courage enough to suggest that in Banquo and Fleance "Natures Coppie's not eterne," but Macbeth, who possibly senses the weakness in her being, desires to keep her ignorant of that which he intends:

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest Chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed.

| To Lady Macbeth comes one other great opportunity of showing her power, before her spirit finally breaks. The fourth scene of the third act is that in which the nobles assemble to the banquet. Macbeth raves at Banquo's ghost which to all but him is invisible, and she attempts to calm the amazed guests: |

Sit worthy Friends: my Lord is often thus,
 And hath beene from his youth. Pray you keepe Seat,
 The fit is momentary, vpon a thought
 He will againe be well. If much you note him
 You shall offend him, and extend his Passion,
 Feed, and regard him not.

Then, with a swift movement to her husband,
 "Are you a man?" she asks:

O proper stuffe:
 This is the very painting of your feare:
 This is the Ayre-drawne-Dagger which you said
 Led you to *Duncan*. O, these flawes and starts
 (Impostors to true feare) would well become
 A womans story, at a Winters fire
 Authoriz'd by her Grandam: shame it selfe,
 Why do you make such faces? When all's done
 You looke but on a stoole. . . .
 What? quite vnmann'd in folly . . .
 Fie for shame. . . .
 My worthy Lord
 Your Noble Friends do lacke you.

Once more she turns to the lords, seeing that
 Macbeth is too far gone in his terror:

Thinke of this good Peeres
 But as a thing of Custome: 'Tis no other,
 Onely it spoyles the pleasure of the time. . . .
 I pray you speake not; he growes worse & worse . . .
 Stand not vpon the order of your going,
 But go at once. . . . A kinde goodnight to all.

The strain has evidently told on her; her words
 with Macbeth are short and exhausted:

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Almost at oddes with morning, which is which . . .

Did you send to him Sir? . . .

You lacke the season of all Natures, sleepe.

|Thereafter she vanishes, to reappear—ironically enough—in the sleep-walking scene, when the fatal irony of her earlier words is disastrously fulfilled. |

These deeds must not be thought

After these wayes: so, it will make vs mad. . . .

A little Water cleares vs of this deed,

How easie is it then?—

these phrases are, as it were, caught up by destiny, and in her madness she sees the blood upon her hand which all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten, and she repeats once more what she had told Macbeth—"What's done cannot be undone."

| So Lady Macbeth vanishes from our sight, her essential frailty made manifest to us. We are left with the impression, not of a fiend-woman, but of a woman in whom will conquered certain softer parts in her nature, a nature, however, which was to reassert itself when the will had been broken and shattered by too great strain and exhaustion. |

|Finally, there are two motives stressed towards the close of this drama which contribute towards arousing in the minds of audience and of readers a feeling of sympathy towards Macbeth. Already, as has been shown, his qualms of conscience remove him from the band of ordinary stage villains. He is a noble and loyal general who succumbs to the fatal desire for kingly supremacy. Mild by nature, he seeks for honour and for friends. No sooner, however, is Duncan despatched than the grooms

have to be stabbed in their drunken slumber, and immediately after Macbeth finds it necessary to engage some villains to make away with Banquo. His mind grows more and more bloody: |

Come, seeling Night,
 Skarfe vp the tender Eye of pittifull Day,
 And with thy bloodie and inuisible Hand
 Cancell and teare to pieces that great Bond
 Which keepes me pale. Light thickens, and the Crow
 Makes Wing to th' Rookie Wood:
 Good things of Day begin to droope, and drowse,
 Whiles Nights black Agents to their Prey's doe rowse.
 Thou maruell'st at my words: but hold thee still,
 Things bad begun, make strong themselues by ill.

| From this he passes to the slaughter of Lady Macduff and her child. We are not on the stage shown anything further, but by hearsay we learn of his continually increasing villainy: |

Not in the Legions
 Of horrid Hell, can come a Diuell more damn'd
 In evils, to top *Macbeth*. . . . I grant him Bloody,
 Luxurious, Auaricious, False, Deceitfull,
 Sodaine, Malicious, smacking of euery sinne
 That ha's a name [so that] each new Morne
 New Widdowes howl, new Orphans cry, new sorowes
 Strike Heauen on the face.

| Not only, then, does Macbeth pass from murder to murder, but he accumulates on himself sins of which before he was innocent. "Luxurious," as has been pointed out, can hardly have been used in any sense save that of sexual sin. The strange anomaly is

that in the very presentation of Macbeth as passing from his loyal generalship to a life of crime Shakespeare has made us feel a sympathy for his hero. We do not pity him; but we feel an emotion of awe in witnessing his ruin. The evils of his later days, while they spring from his character, seem to rise from that character warped and tortured. |

| Correspondent with this is the peculiar atmosphere of satiety which fills the latter part of the tragedy. It is to be noted that, while Lady Macbeth disappears for some scenes after the banquet, to reappear only in somnambulance, Macbeth similarly vanishes immediately after he has formed the terrible plan of murdering Lady Macduff. When he comes again upon the stage, the armies that have gathered against him have surrounded Dunsinane. The end of the tragedy is approaching, and Shakespeare has quite evidently put all his strength into the depiction of the King's state of mind. Bravery is emphasised, and a kind of hysterical excitement, and a new note of satiety.) His first words are words of courage and wild anger:

Bring me no more Reports, let them flye all:
Till Byrnane wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot faint with Feare. . . .
The diuell damne thee blacke, thou cream-fac'd Loone:
Where got'st thou that Goose-looke. . . .
Go pricke thy face and ouer-red thy feare,
Thou Lilly-liuer'd Boy. What Soldiers, Patch!
Death of thy Soule, those Linnen cheekes of thine
Are Counsailers to feare. What Soldiers Whay-face?

This note, however, is soon transformed to one of melancholy sadness:

Seyton, I am sick at hart,
 When I behold: *Seyton*, I say, this push
 Will cheere me euer, or dis-eate me now.
 I haue liu'd long enough: my way of life
 Is falne into the Seare, the yellow Leafe,
 And that which should accompany Old-Age,
 As Honor, Loue, Obedience, Troopes of Friends,
 I must not looke to haue: but in their steed,
 Curses, not lowd but deepe, Mouth-honor, breath
 Which the poore heart would faine deny, and dare not.

His mind is completely unsettled. He calls for his armour and bids his servant put it on; a moment later he calls for it to be pulled off. In the next scene his sense of the evanescence of life is still further intensified. His wife dies, and his words re-echo the note of heart-dulled satiety:

She should haue dy'de heere after;
 There would haue beene a time for such a word:
 To morrow, and to morrow, and to morrow,
 Creepes in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last Syllable of Recorded time:
 And all our yesterdayes, haue lighted Fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, breefe Candle,
 Life's but a walking Shadow, a poore Player,
 That struts and frets his houre vpon the Stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a Tale
 Told by an Ideot, full of sound and fury
 Signifying nothing.

The mood passes to frenzied courage when the news of Birnam Wood reaches the castle, but we have seen enough to know Macbeth's mental misery. There has come to him, too, a weariness of slaughter:

Of all men else I haue auoyded thee,

he tells Macduff,

But get thee backe: my soule is too much charg'd
With blood of thine already.

The last we see of him is in a vision of clashing swords and burnished targets, and his words sounding over all:

Yet I will try the last. Before my body,
I throw my warlike Shield: Lay on *Macduffe*,
And damn'd be him, that first cries hold, enough. /

| With this presentation of bravery allied to satiety, Shakespeare has enabled us to enter sympathetically into Macbeth's last days. He is not merely the typical tyrant that Macduff paints him. There is in him the true nobility of soul which accompanies the genuinely heroic. Our whole attitude towards him, too, is coloured by the atmosphere of decay. There is here that intangible sense of waste which Professor Bradley so ably summarised and which leads towards a note of mystery and sadness. Almost all Shakespeare's tragedies end on this mellowed and subdued tone. | The close of *Hamlet* is "religious"; *Othello* ends on the broken-hearted determination of the Moor; in *Lear* we move from the torment of the heath to the quietness—albeit the horror—of the final act. In every one of these three is an emphasis on the shows of life, as if this existence into which all his heroes enter so strenuously is nothing more than a mere pageant. | The close of *Macbeth* anticipates fully the still more famous atmosphere of *The Tempest*, where life is but a

vision, a thing seen for a moment, and then passing imperceptibly beyond the ken of mortal man: |

You doe looke (my son) in a mou'd sort,
As if you were dismaid: be cheerefull Sir,
Our Reuels now are ended: These our actors
(As I foretold you) were all Spirits, and
Are melted into Ayre, into thin Ayre,
And like the baselesse fabricke of this vision
The Clowd-capt Towres, the gorgeous Pallaces,
The solemne Temples, the great Globe it selfe,
Yea, all which i. inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantiall Pageant faded
Leaue not a racke behinde: we are such stuffe
As dreames are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleepe.

VI

THE TRAGEDIE OF KING LEAR

THE problem of *King Lear*, in its own way, is as peculiar as any presented by Shakespeare's tragedies. In the first place, the structure displays a marked falling off from the finely conceived plan of *Othello*, and even from the less accurately worked-out plot of *Macbeth*. In the latter drama we find the typical rise and fall of ordinary tragedy, whereas in *Lear* there is a reversion to a play-construction which reminds us of the days of the chronicle-history. The scenes hurry after one another in careless confusion. We are swept from one corner of England to another, and from England into France. The disposition of the material knows hardly any restraint, so that

we have the impression that in *Lear* Shakespeare showed less than in any other of his great tragedies the power of his art. In *Hamlet* he was no doubt reworking an earlier melodramatic theme, a fact which would account for many of the inconsistencies and weaknesses in that drama; in *Othello* he was moving along a path obviously conscious and deliberate; in *Macbeth* his structure was simple and straightforward. *Lear*, on the contrary, impresses us as a mighty but a careless production. Nowhere does Shakespeare so show himself the child of nature.

This particular feature of *Lear* has been summed up by Charles Lamb in his famous pronouncement that the tragedy can never be acted. Normally, Shakespeare is the dramatist *par excellence*. Usually plot and character are kept strictly subservient to the exigencies of the stage. Here, however, he writes a play which must fail to capture our full attention in the playhouse and which even in the study does not present that unity of interest which is apparent in the other dramas. In those other tragedies all is subordinate to a single figure or group of figures which gives tone to the whole. In *Lear*, on the contrary, the King is presented after the first scene as a character acted against, and is set beside a number of other persons each individually analysed. Our attention is set not only on Lear; it centres as well on Kent, the Fool, and Cordelia. In this play, too, we are presented with a quite definite sub-plot, as distinct from the sub-episodes of the other plays. Gloucester, Edmund, and Edgar serve to take our minds away from the one

dominant person. It is strange to observe that, while we have thus at least seven characters all of individuality and tragic proportions, Shakespeare has nowhere shown himself so careless in presenting mere puppet figures. Whatever may be said of Regan and Goneril, they must be relegated to the world of mere stage creations. Claudius is not an heroic person, but he has at least motive for his crime and a certain flabbiness of constitution which marks him out as an individual. Regan and Goneril are nothing but monsters. While, then, we may esteem *Lear* as one of the finest and most comprehensive of Shakespeare's productions, we are compelled to admit that in its function as a work of dramatic art it fails when compared with the other three plays, and that it is not planned with that all-pervading subtlety which characterises those others.

One further peculiarity may be noted. In spite of the fact that in many respects *Lear* is more complicated in structure and presentation of character, it and *Macbeth* are simpler than *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Concerning the latter two there has been a great diversity of opinion among critics, hardly any two agreeing entirely about the first and many differing widely about *Othello*. On *Macbeth* and *Lear*, however, there are comparatively few conflicting theories. These dramas seem easier to analyse. For this fact there may be one of two reasons. We may assume that because *Hamlet* and *Othello* are earlier in date, they are accordingly to be regarded as experimental; that they contain a number of inconsistencies which may be interpreted in diverse manners and consequently may give rise to widely varying theories

concerning the analysis of character and aim. On the other hand, we may argue that the reason for the unanimity of opinion regarding the later dramas is due to the fact that they are less subtly conceived; that Shakespeare, under the strain of continued productivity, failed to throw into them that wealth of suggestion which is manifest in the earlier two. No absolutely definite answer to this problem may be found; but it would appear that the second explanation has more of truth in it than the first. We are almost inevitably forced to believe that Shakespeare's genius, glorious as it might always remain, was passing from the more tremendous imaginative fervour of its maturity to natural decay. *Lear* is on the path that leads to *A Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*.

For a consideration of Shakespeare's aims in writing this tragedy, an analysis of his sources, particularly of the *True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*, is imperative. That Shakespeare knew this drama there can be small doubt. There are motives and figures in it which are to be found reproduced in his *Lear*, and such parallelisms we can hardly assume to have been mere coincidence. We may assume that while Holinshed remained the prime inspiration, the master dramatist did not neglect to study the work of his anonymous predecessor. It may not therefore be un instructive to consider the plot and development of character in the earlier play for the purpose of estimating how far Shakespeare modified the earlier conception.

Constructed in the true chronicle-history method,

King Leir is divided into a number of short scenes, shifting easily from one locality and one mood to another. The drama opens with a discussion between Leir and his counsellors, in the course of which the King declares (1) that he does not know his daughters well, their care having been left to the deceased queen; (2) that he proposes to divide his kingdom—

And I would fayne resigne these earthly cares,
And thinke vpon the welfare of my soule:
Which by no better meanes may be effected,
Then by resigning vp the Crowne from me ;—

(3) that Cornwall and Cambria are suitors to Gonorill and Ragan; (4) that his “youngest daughter, fair Cordella, vows no liking to a monarch, unless love allows.” After a certain amount of argument he decides to ask his daughters which loves him best so that he may cheat Cordella into accepting his own choice of a husband:

I am resolu'd, and euen now my mind
Doth meditate a sudden stratagem,
To try which of my daughters loues me best:
Which till I know, I cannot be in rest.
This graunted, when they ioyntly shall contend,
Eche to exceed the other in their loue:
Then at the vantage will I take *Cordella*,
Euen as she doth protest she loues me best,
Ile say, Then, daughter, graunt me one request,
To shew thou louest me as thy sisters doe,
Accept a husband, whom my selfe will woo.
This sayd, she cannot well deny my sute,
Although (poore soule) her sences will be mute:
Then will I tryumph in my policy,
And match her with a King of Brittany.

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Skalliger, one of the counsellors, betrays Leir's purposes to Gonorill and Ragan, who are in rage with Cordella, "that proud pert peat" who so lightly accounts of her elder sisters. "She is so nice and so demure, so sober, courteous, modest, precise" that all the Court talk of her, and Ragan is afraid she may catch the best husband. On hearing Skalliger's news, they decide to make such answers to Leir that Cordella will be forced into silence. "Nay," says Gonorill,

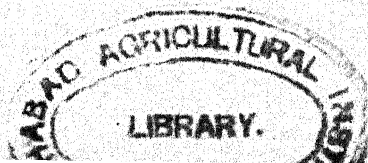
Nay, our reuenge we will inflict on her,
Shall be accounted piety in vs:
I will so flatter with my doting father,
As he was ne're so flattred in his life.
Nay, I will say, that if it be his pleasure,
To match me to a begger, I will yeeld:
For why, I know what euer I do say,
He meanes to match me with the Cornwall King.

Ragan's decision is to the same effect:

Ile say the like: for I am well assured,
What e're I say to please the old mans mind,
Who dotes, as if he were a child agayne,
I shall inioy the noble Cambrian Prince:
Only, to feed his humour, will suffice,
To say, I am content with any one
Whom heele appoynt me.

At the close we are warned that Leir "is alwayes in extreames," and accordingly will turn his love of Cordella to hate. In the next scene Leir enters with Perillus (the later Kent) presaging some ill:

And yet, me thinks, my mind presageth still
I know not what; and yet I feare some ill.



The replies of *Gonorill* and *Ragan* are in the strain already anticipated:

Gonorill. I hope, my gracious father makes no doubt
Of any of his daughters loue to him:
Yet for my part, to shew my zeale to you,
Which cannot be in windy words rehearst,
I prize my loue to you at such a rate,
I thinke my life inferiour to my loue.
Should you inioyne me for to tye a milstone
About my neck, and leape into the Sea,
At your commaund I willingly would doe it:
Yea, for to doe you good, I would ascend
The highest Turret in all Brittany,
And from the top leape headlong to the ground:
Nay, more, should you appoynt me for to marry
The meanest vassayle in the spacious world,
Without reply I would accomplish it:
In briebe, commaund what euer you desire,
And if I fayle, no fauour I require . . .

Ragan. O, that my simple vtterance could suffice,
To tell the true intention of my heart,
Which burnes in zeale of duty to your grace,
And neuer can be quench'd, but by desire
To shew the same in outward forwardnesse.
Oh, that there were some other mayd that durst
But make a challenge of her loue with me:
Ide make her soone confesse she neuer loued
Her father halfe so well so I doe you.
I then, my deeds should proue in playner case,
How much my zeale aboundeth to your grace:
But for them all, let this one meane suffice,
To ratify my loue before your eyes:
I haue right noble Suters to my loue,
No worse then Kings, and happely I loue one:
Yet, would you haue me make my choyce anew,
Ide bridle fancy, and be rulde by you.

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Quite naturally, Cordella replies in an honest and simple strain:

I cannot paynt my duty forth in words,
I hope my deeds shall make report for me:
But looke what loue the child doth owe the father,
The same to you I beare, my gracious Lord.

Ragan and Gonorill raise their shrieking voices in protest, Leir flies into an ungovernable passion, and Cordella is banished from his favour, Perillus alone sympathising with her. The following scenes tell us of the decision of the Gallian king to go with Mumford disguised into Brittany, of the dividing of the Kingdom between Cornwall and Cambria and of the hate of Cordella by Ragan and Gonorill:

Gonorill. Sister, when did you see *Cordella* last,
That prety piece, that thinks none good ynough
To speake to her, because (sir-reuerence)
She hath a little beauty extraordinary? . . .

Ragan. In faith, poore soule, I pittie her a little.
Would she were lesse fayre, or more fortunate.

Cordella meets the Gallian King and accepts the offer of his hand; Gonorill cuts Leir's allowance by half and he, with Perillus, goes to Ragan, thinking now of his unkindness to Cordella; Cornwall shows sympathy with Leir, but his letters are intercepted by Gonorill; Ragan suborns a messenger to kill Leir and Perillus, but the latter, faced by their powerlessness and alarmed by a storm, spares them. Meanwhile Cordella has prepared to go to England; on her journey she meets the fainting Leir, succours him, and, with a French army, defeats the forces of the two evil sisters, Leir once more being enthroned.

In reading this story, Shakespeare, with his eye for dramatic situations, would have seen that the torment of the old King might be made exceedingly effective and that he could make of Cordella a wonderful study. At the same time, he must have realised that, if full dramatic intensity were to be secured, a tragi-comic structure would be impossible. Only by raising the whole theme to the levels of high tragedy could the story be rendered pregnant with that tremendous atmosphere of awe and mystery which marks the highest art. Out of the older play Shakespeare has retained a number of salient features, which for convenience may be summarised—

- (1) the general conduct of the tale to the fourth act, with a marked divergence of the first two scenes;
- (2) the headstrong nature of Lear and the frankness and devotion of Cordelia;
- (3) the honest figure of Perillus-Kent.

More important are the omissions and the additions in *Lear*. The parts missed out and deliberately altered may occupy our attention first:

- (1) The change from the more "historically" correct atmosphere of *Leir* to the mixture of elements in the later *Lear*. Cornwall is retained, but Cambria becomes Albany. Gaul becomes France and a Duke of Burgundy is inserted. Perillus is similarly changed into the more modern Kent. It may be suggested that these alterations were made for the purpose of rendering the atmosphere of *Lear* less romantic, of bringing it closer to men's feelings and experience;

(2) the omission of Leir's motive in asking for a profession of love from his daughters;

(3) the omission of a motive for Cordelia's blunt answers;

(4) the crushing of Acts I and II of *Leir* into a single scene;

(5) the omission of the courting of Cordella by the Gallian King;

(6) the omission of Ragan's attempt upon Leir's life;

(7) the omission of human traits in Ragan and Gonorill.

Besides these clearly marked omissions and alterations there are a number of additions, of which three are of importance:

(1) The introduction of a sub-plot;

(2) the introduction of the Fool;

(3) the elaboration of the messenger in the figure of Oswald. From an examination of these additions, omissions, and alterations must a true analysis of *Lear* spring.

We may, first of all, consider the introduction of the Gloucester-Edmund-Edgar sub-plot and of the Fool. In *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, not only is there no definite subsidiary action, but all the minor incidents not directly connected with the hero have a bearing upon the character of the hero or upon the unravelling of the plot. That Shakespeare had a purpose in departing from his usual method cannot be questioned; and that purpose may be discovered in the desire to add to the impression of tragic universality. The themes of the other tragedies are, more or less, "normal"—a son faced by the

murderer of his beloved father, a husband intrigued into believing his wife unfaithful, an ambitious general committing a crime in order to secure a throne—all of these are themes we may readily submit to. Common experience might well have shown an Elizabethan audience minor Hamlets and Othellos and Macbeths. The story of Lear is more peculiar than any of these. The strange, head-strong nature of Lear, his demanding verbal evidence of love from his daughters, the abnormal cruelty of the two sisters—these, unlike the emotions and situations of the other tragedies, might well appear, if not impossible, at least highly improbable. To counter this impression Shakespeare introduced the theme of Gloucester. Gloucester is another Lear. He casts off his truly loving son and trusts all to his villainous illegitimate brother. The evil son prosecutes his father, and the good son, who has been banished from his favour, comforts and succours him in his agony. Nowhere is the parallel deliberately emphasised, but unconsciously the minds of the spectators, in viewing the two stories, are led to believe that Lear's nature and Lear's position are not isolated and peculiar to himself. The inclusion of the sub-plot, therefore, while it certainly tends towards complexity and the removing of attention from Lear, furthers considerably the dramatic development of the play. The inclusion of the Fool has no such purpose, but it has an end which bears a certain resemblance to this. Lear's folly is in a way contrasted with the Fool's wisdom. The Fool serves as a foil to the main figure, and by his antithesis tends to intensify elements which, if

set in juxtaposition to Kent's honesty alone, might well have gone unnoticed. The Fool serves this end, and two others. He is, in the first place, one of the trio of men whose wits are, or seem to be, afflicted in the climax of the play. Lear with his real madness, the Fool with his slightly disordered wits, and Edgar with his feigned idiocy all clash and produce an impression which any two of them alone would have failed to engender. The Fool, too, is a kind of relief. In converting the old tragicomic *Leir* into a tragedy, Shakespeare made the aged King, not merely travel-worn and weary, but actually lunatic through his misfortunes; the sight of madness, he must have felt, would have to be countered by some element which should prevent the minds of the audience from sinking too far into mere horror. Madness is a terrible thing to witness on the stage, or elsewhere; and Shakespeare must have realised the imperative necessity of providing something besides the somewhat ineffective honesty and frankness of Kent to make this madness not too evident and not too awful. The Fool, therefore, for the plot and for the character of Lear himself is an all-powerful auxiliary.

Much more important is a consideration of the first three omissions noted above (2, 3, and 4). In this connection we must observe the lengthy analysis devoted to them by Tolstoi. The Russian author, writing with little sympathy for Shakespeare and probably incapable of appreciating the finer shades of *Lear*, has uncompromisingly condemned the later work. That this view is mistaken in its stricter application cannot be doubted, but it is equally

certain that it deserves very careful examination. In the older *Leir* there is a perfectly just and appreciable motive for the King's action in asking for the profession of love from his daughters; there is a perfectly just and appreciable motive for the speeches of Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella. There are many careless things in Shakespeare's tragedy, but we may hardly assume that this fundamental alteration was due to carelessness on the dramatist's part. The exposition is the most important part of any play, and Shakespeare's normally deliberate and painstaking first acts prove that he appreciated this fact and put forward his powers to counter the difficulties presented by the opening of the dramatic action. No other answer can be found to the question raised by this omission than that Shakespeare desired to heighten the characters of Lear and Cordelia. It is as if he had consciously neglected to provide the slightest motive for the actions of the King and his daughter in order that their characters might thereby stand out in greater relief. Here, it is necessary to consider carefully the fundamental atmosphere of the tragedy of *King Lear*. *Othello* is a drama of deception and self-deception; *Macbeth* is a drama of ambition; in *Lear* we have a drama of pride. This pride, however, is not an ordinary pride, but a false type, egoistic and overweening. In the old *Leir* the King is to a large extent justified in his wrath. He does not know his daughters, as he expressly tells us, and he does not know of Skalliger's treachery. Considered impartially, his wrath has in it nothing that is not without cause. In the *Lear* of Shakespeare, on the

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other hand, the dramatist has endeavoured in every way to make the king's senile dotage apparent. This is stressed in several ways. First, the kingdom has been divided before Lear calls his daughters before him. Says Gloucester:

But now, in the diuision of the Kingdome, it appears not which of the Dukes hee valewes most, for Equalities are so weigh'd, that curiosity in neither, can make choise of eithers moyety.

Know that we have diuided
In three our Kingdome,

announces Lear as soon as he enters upon the stage. Already he knows which portion will go to Goneril and Regan:

Of all these bounds euen from this Line, to this,
With shadowie Forrests, and with Champains rich'd
With plenteous Riuers, and wide-skirted Meades
We make thee Lady. . . .
To thee, and thine hereditarie euer,
Remaine this ample third of our faire Kingdome,
No lesse in space, validitie, and pleasure
Then that conferr'd on *Gonerill*.

Yet he is made to offer Cordelia a still greater third:

What can you say, to draw
A third, more opulent then your Sisters?

Lear's division of his kingdom, then, is an already settled thing; there is no mention of lots here; his pageantary court scene is but an old man's folly, a pretence of egoistic pride. Secondly, the requesting of his daughters' professions of love is no more important. Again it is an old man's folly, the

desire to hear words of flattery and of adoration. He expresses no relief on hearing Goneril's and Regan's speeches as does the older Leir. He accepts their words as his due, merely apportioning out those parts of the kingdom which he had already determined on. Thirdly, Lear is not presented as ignorant of his daughters. Cordelia is "our joy, although the last, not least," and he will give her a "third more opulent then" her sisters. In bursting into an ungovernable passion against her, Lear has therefore no justification. His headstrong anger, his whole egoistic and proud bearing, display this false pride of his which was to create his undoing. So, too, with Cordelia. If Cordelia had merely given a blunt refusal to a request from Lear that she should marry the husband of his choice, she would have been perfectly right. In the old *Leir* her reply to her father is of this nature, for, with her quick intelligence, she divines aright that, after the speeches of her sisters, this will be her father's next question. Obviously, from Leir's opening speeches, he had spoken to her on this matter previously, and she had declared that she would marry only for love. As it is, Cordelia is in the wrong. She reveals in herself a certain fatal weakness. It is instructive here to notice how in all his great dramas Shakespeare has provided not only his heroes but his heroines also with a fatal error in their natures. This fatal error, this *ἀμαρτία*, is suggested in Ophelia, emphasised deeply in Desdemona and in Lady Macbeth, and quite clearly present in Cordelia. There is, too, a noticeable resemblance between the particular tragic flaw of

the hero and that of the heroine. In Othello and Desdemona it is deception and self-deception, in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth it is ambition. As regards *Lear*, the truth becomes increasingly apparent, as we read and re-read Cordelia's speeches, that she has Lear's own nature. No ordinary person would have been so offended at Regan's and Goneril's speeches as Cordelia is. It is her false pride, this egoistic, overweening pride, that causes her undoing. It is not that she is modest and bashful; she knows her own worth only too well:

What shall *Cordelia* speake? Loue, and be silent. . . .

Then poore *Cordelia*,

And yet not so, since I am sure my loue's
More ponderous then my tongue.

She takes undue umbrage at her sisters' hypocrisy and at Lear's suggestion that her words may win her material reward. She is too proud to descend into the arena of wordy oratory. It is this that forms the fatal error in her character. She sins less grievously than Lear, it is true, and her punishment is less; but it ultimately leads to her death. Other elements, too, Cordelia shares with her father. One of the most noticeable is a certain tendency in both towards appreciating things not on a spiritual or emotional, but on a strictly mechanical and materialistic, plane. Lear in a later scene proceeds to *number* the loves of his daughters:

Ile go with thee,

Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou art twice her Loue.

Even when ample opportunity has been given him

to see the natures of his three daughters, he fails to regard them save from the point of view of his own physical surroundings. It is the same essentially materialistic attitude towards life which makes Cordelia answer her father in such curt terms:

Vnhappie that I am, I cannot heaue
My heart into my mouth: I loue your Majesty
According to my bond, no more nor lesse. . . .

Good my Lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lou'd me.
I returne those duties backe as are right fit,
Obey you, Loue you, and most Honour you.
Why haue my Sisters Husbands, if they say
They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
That Lord, whose hand must take my plight, shall carry
Halfe my loue with him, halfe my Care, and Dutie;
Sure I shall neuer marry like my Sisters,
To loue my Father all.

There is, too, in both, arising out of these two qualities, a certain feature which we may style lack of adaptability to circumstances. It is this lack which causes Lear to lose his equanimity on hearing Cordelia's answer; it is this that arouses Cordelia's obstinacy; it is this which makes Lear such a shuttlecock when he is faced by the resolute wills of his two daughters. Lear and Cordelia have the same virtues and the same defects. Their tragedies are the same. It was possibly the realisation of this, added to his preoccupation with the character of Lear, which caused Shakespeare to give Cordelia an almost insignificant part. Other reasons may, of course, be suggested. It may have been that the Fool and Cordelia were planned for the same actor;

certainly the two are never on the stage together. Had Shakespeare imagined Cordelia disguising as the Fool and engaging herself in Lear's service he could not more clearly have separated the rôles of the two characters. From her betrothal to her reappearance as a kind of ministering angel to the storm-tossed Lear, she absolutely vanishes from the play. It is highly probable, however, that the dramatist realised the affinity of their natures, and felt that too great a part for Cordelia would take away from the attention he wished to concentrate on Lear.

Evidently, in this tragedy Shakespeare desired most to emphasise Lear's position. Anything that is near him is clearly marked out; anything which is away from him is but hastily slurred over. Shakespeare must have seen that, in introducing madness in his hero, he would have to provide some well-drawn foils. For this purpose partly, as we have seen, he brought in the Fool. The old Perillus in the chronicle-history was thoroughly satisfactory, so he was retained as Kent. The weaving together of the main plot and of the new sub-theme gave yet another foil in the person of Edgar, who, with his feigned madness, both relieved and intensified the real madness of the King. This necessity of depicting in detail the surroundings of Lear must have appeared all the greater to Shakespeare precisely because Lear, unlike the other tragic heroes, is actionless after the first scene. The dividing of his kingdom and the throwing off of Cordelia spring entirely from his character; but thereafter his miseries are heaped upon him by the evil devices of his daughters. Through the exigencies of the plot

Lear has to disappear from the play for many scenes. Except for I. ii. he dominates the first act; but he does not appear in the first three scenes of Act II. In Act III. he occupies attention in two scenes, but he vanishes in III. vii. and does not come before us again till IV. vi. During the whole of Act V. he appears only at the very close of the play. In order, therefore, to keep him as the dominant figure, peculiar stressing of his surroundings was necessary, and at the same time special intensification of his character. In the opening of the drama, Shakespeare attempted to secure the effect by removing all normal motives for Lear's act, so as to make his decisions flow entirely from the error in his own nature and not from any external circumstances; by presenting Lear as having already divided his kingdom; and by crushing the first two acts of the old *Leir* into one scene.

Such must have been Shakespeare's intention; but it may well be questioned whether he succeeded in accomplishing his object. Whatever eulogies have been cast upon the exposition of *Lear* cannot conceal the fact that this first scene is a failure. It is easily the most uninteresting long scene of the drama, and must strike any actor as an almost impossible scene to play satisfactorily. In endeavouring to secure his effect, Shakespeare for once seems to have overreached himself. The writer of the old *Leir* may not have had a high conception of his theme; Shakespeare might not have been able to weave a tragedy out of the material presented to him there; but the older writer at least provided his main characters with normal and appreciable motives,

whereas Shakespeare has left us with something which simply cannot be tolerated on the stage, for to find an explanation for Lear's decisions and demeanour in this first scene we need to know the subsequent development of the plot; by themselves they are perfectly unintelligible.

I have thus stressed Shakespeare's obvious concern regarding Lear himself, resultant upon the exigencies of the tragedy as a whole, because that seems to me to explain some of the other alterations and also a certain number of what seem to be blemishes in the drama. That hopelessly artificial passage in which the King of France accepts Cordelia displays clearly enough the difficulties Shakespeare felt in writing the first scene. It could hardly have been other than sketchy and artificial. To have presented, as in the older play, the romantic wooing of Cordelia by the King in his palmer's disguise would have been to throw a spot-light on Cordelia and a consequent shadow on Lear. France is, therefore, made to utter the tamest of sentiments and depart with his poor treasure:

Fairest *Cordelia*, that art most rich being poore,
Most choise forsaken, and most lou'd despis'd,
Thee and thy vertues here I seize vpon,
Be it lawfull I take vp what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'Tis strange, that from their cold'st neglect
My Loue should kindle to enflam'd respect.
Thy dowerlesse Daughter King, throwne to my chance,
Is Queen of vs, of ours, and our faire *France*:
Not all the Dukes of watrish *Burgundy*,
Can buy this vnpriz'd precious Maid of me.
Bid them farewell *Cordelia*, though vnkinde,
Thou loosest here a better where to finde.

One could have wished it were possible to prove that these lines were not by Shakespeare or that they were remnants of an earlier *Lear* of his callow youth, but we may accept them, I think, as his own, manifesting in their stiffness and mental rigidity the dramatist's recognition of his own failure to make his scene live and his obvious desire to push on to more congenial subject-matter.

So, too, with the characters of Regan and Goneril. Had Shakespeare stressed ever so little their individualities, they, in their position as protagonists in the later portions of the play, would completely have driven Lear from our minds. For Shakespeare's purpose they had to remain mere types, puppets filling their small parts but never occupying any position of importance. In *Othello* Iago could be presented as a full-length, carefully-drawn figure, because the Moor was of sufficient stature to take care of himself; but in *Lear* the villains had to take subordinate rôles. We may note, perhaps, that Goneril is the more stern-willed of the pair. It is she who first broaches to her sister the idea that they must protect themselves against their father's folly; and it is she who says:

We must do something, and i' th' heate;

but any more elaborate attempts to differentiate or to analyse their characters must be doomed to failure, precisely because Shakespeare intended them to be mere figureheads. From the point of view of dramatic effect this may have been absolutely necessary, but it forms, like the artificial wooing-scene, a blemish in the play. It shows that Shakespeare, through ex-

haustion or haste, had failed to think out the scheme and the possibilities of *Lear* as he had thought out and considered the scheme and possibilities of *Othello*.

Finally, we come to the last omission and addition in the play. The omission is that of Regan's and Goneril's attempt to kill Lear. A consideration of this and of the corresponding addition—the blinding of Gloucester—must be carefully made, and, if carefully made, seems to show that Shakespeare's attention was devoted more to the end than to the beginning of the tragedy. All through, his object was to throw Lear's folly into the strongest relief possible. For this purpose all the reasonable logic is put into the mouths of Regan and Goneril. His age is full of changes, and he is as likely to cast the other two sisters from his grace as he had cast off Cordelia, she whom he always loved the most. They are as likely to have evidence of the inconsistent starts of his nature seen in Kent's banishment. His knights may well cause disturbances:

Not only Sir this, your all-lycenc'd Foole,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourelly Carpe and Quarrell, breaking forth
In ranke, and (not to be endur'd) riots Sir.
I had thought by making this well known vnto you,
To have found a safe redresse, but now grow fearefull
By what your selfe too late haue spoke and done,
That you protect this course and put it on
By your allowance, which if you should, the fault
Would not scape censure nor the redresses sleepe,
Which in the tender of a wholesome weale,
Might in their working do you that offence
Which else were shame, that then necessitie
Will call discreet proceeding.

There is nothing in this speech at which we may cavil. It is self-evident that a band of a hundred knights, kept merely for show, will give rise to riot and disturbance. Nor is Goneril's later speech any the less just:

This admiration Sir, is much o' th' saour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To vnderstand my purposes aright:
As you are Old, and Reuerend, you should be Wise.
Heere do you keepe a hundred Knights and Squires,
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd, and bold,
That this our Court infected with their manners,
Shewe like a riotous Inne; Epicurisme and Lust
Make it more like a Tauerne, or a Brothell,
Then a grac'd Pallace. The shame it selfe doth speake
For instant remedy. Be then desir'd
By her, that else will take the thing she begges,
A little to disquantity your Traine,
And the remainders that shall still depend,
To be such men as may besort your Age,
Which know themselves, and you.

There is nothing to be objected to here on reasonable grounds; Lear's train is purely designed to please his foolish, egoistic pride, and Goneril is perfectly just in making her complaint. Regan's words are equally logical and reasonable:

Not altogether so,
I look'd not for you yet, nor am prouided
For your fit welcome. . . .
I dare auouch it Sir, what fifty Followers?
Is it not well? What should you need of more?
Yea, or so many? Sith that both charge and danger,
Speake 'gainst so great a number? How in one house
Should many people, vnder two commands
Hold amity? 'Tis hard, almost impossible.

That Regan and Goneril are shown with all the words of logic on their side can have been intended only to heighten Lear's folly and to display yet more clearly his egoism and his pride. On the other hand, to have shown Regan and Goneril as purely just, if somewhat unimaginative, would have been to take from the sympathy we must feel for Lear himself. Regan and Goneril had to be made thoroughly evil, and their cause shown to be a wrong one, even in spite of their father's folly. Had the two daughters made a separate or joint attempt on Lear's life we should have lost the full effect of their logical position, and, as a consequence, of the folly which is by that thrown into relief. To reveal their completely evil natures, therefore, Shakespeare had recourse to making them lustful and wantonly cruel. The tearing out of Gloucester's eyes is a terrible scene, allowable only when we remember the love of horror in the seventeenth-century theatre, but it has a definite value for the development of the plot. Had it not been there, we might still have felt an almost subconscious sympathy for Regan and her sister. Once more we realise Shakespeare's wonderful power of using apparently conflicting themes to secure one common end. It is difficult to rest on intellectual analysis alone, for Shakespeare was relying on the emotions of an audience, where we must "speake what we feelee, not what we ought to say."

The general outlines of Lear's character have already been traced, and so many brilliant analyses of it have been given by other writers, that little need be done here save to indicate some of the more important features and to attempt a picture of his

development throughout the play. The first scene, as I have shown, because of an attempt to intensify Lear's egoistic pride, is a failure. Everywhere Shakespeare has striven to exaggerate the main elements in his character; his sudden bursts of anger at Cordelia and at Kent, his cry of "On thy allegiance, hear me!" and the other:

Better thou had'st

Not beene borne, then not t' haue pleas'd me better—

all serve to throw into relief these salient qualities in his nature. At the same time, he is shown to have other characteristics which by their clash with the others provoke in his brain a loss of balance similar to the loss of balance already seen in Hamlet's mind. Within a few lines of the beginning of Scene iv he cries "No more of that" to the statement made by one of his knights that since Cordelia's departure the Fool has pined away. Within a minute or two we find him exclaiming on his own previous folly:

O most small fault

How vgly did'st thou in *Cordelia* show?

The following scene presents him harping on the same theme, the Fool endeavouring to keep his mind at rest: "I did her wrong," he cries to his companion. It is the sudden shock from the realisation of the results of his own hasty action, coupled with the tremendous blow to his pride, that finally unhinges his brain. It is not the "monstrous ingratitude" of Regan and Goneril which afflicts him, but this double blow to his previous royal

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eqanimity; so that, immediately after the last lines I quoted, we find him praying to the gods:

O let me not be mad, not mad sweet Heauen,
Keepe me in temper, I would not be mad.

This blow to his pride is emphasised once more in Act II when Gloucester speaks of the "fiery quality" of the duke:

Vengeance, Plague, Death, Confusion:
Fiery? What quality? Why *Gloster, Gloster*,
I'd speake with the Duke of *Cornewall* and his wife . . .
The King would speake with *Cornwall*,
Are they inform'd of this? My breath and blood:
Fiery? The fiery Duke?

The repetition of the phrase "Who put my man i' th' stocks?" is not the result of any compassion towards Kent, but purely of his sense of injured dignity. That this dignity is not true and based on strength of character has already been hinted at in the first scene, and more than hinted at in Lear's unwillingness to believe Regan wronged. It is left without a possibility of doubt when towards the end of II. iv. the King turns from Regan to Goneril in almost appealing tones:

I gave you all. . . .
Made you my Guardians, my Depositories,
But kept a reseruatioun to be followed
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With fiewe and twenty? Regan, said you so? . . .
[to *Goneril*] Ile go with thee,
Thy fifty yet doth double fiewe and twenty,
And thou art twice her Loue.

This is the last of the perfectly sane Lear that we are fated to see. The first scene of Act III. prepares us for the terrible storm on the heath, with Lear raging to the still more wildly raging elements. In his madness the three or four features we have noted in his character are pronounced—his ungovernable anger, his pride, his essential weakness. The last is shown by his self-pity:

A poore, infirme, weake, and dispis'd old man,
and

I am a man,
More sinn'd against, than sinning.

In this scene, the madness is not complete, but in a moment the monarch has fallen into definite lunacy. For a few scenes he totally vanishes from our sight, and then in IV. vi. he once more comes on the stage fantastically dressed in flowers. His egoistic love of dignity is all-predominant:

I am the King himselfe. . . .
I, euery inch a King.

When I do stare, see how the Subject quakes.
I pardon that mans life. What was thy cause?

It was not the true dignity of kingship that he loved, but the pageantry of it, the petty sense of power that it gave. This wilder form of madness passes away, and Lear wakens, now almost completely broken in spirit, to find Cordelia bending over him:

Pray, do not mocke me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourescore and vpward.

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The fear that others may be laughing at him is his greatest feeling, a fear that had already afflicted him in his madness:

The little dogges, and all,
Trey, Blanch, and Sweet-heart: see, they barke at me.

For one moment only, in the very last scene of the drama, does he rise to truly heroic levels. Out of his torment has come to him a new manhood, although his last words have something of that pitifulness which is at the root of his nature:

And my poore Foole is hang'd: no, no, no life?
Why should a Dog, a Horse, a Rat haue life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Neuer, neuer, neuer, neuer, neuer.
Pray you vndo this Button. Thanke you Sir,
Do you see this? Looke on her? Looke her lips,
Looke there, looke there!

With *Lear* we have reached Shakespeare's last great tragedy outside of the Roman plays. It stands close in point of time to *Timon of Athens* and to *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, both of which point forward to *Cymbeline* and *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. In *Lear*, although it is probably his most beautiful work of art from the poetic point of view, Shakespeare failed, partly because of his central figure, whose essential weakness can hardly be disguised, partly because in overcoming some of the difficulties presented in his theme he fell into dramatic errors which even his magic power could not justify. Considered as a play, *Lear*, because of its puppet-figures, because of its structure, because of its

several artificial scenes, is decidedly the least powerful of the four tragedies. Nowhere has Shakespeare risen to such heights as in the terrible storm passages, but even a whole act will not make a great drama. Exhaustion or a certain carelessness is evident from first scene to last. The tremendous restraint, the careful exposition, the subtle development of character visible in *Othello*—all are absent.

